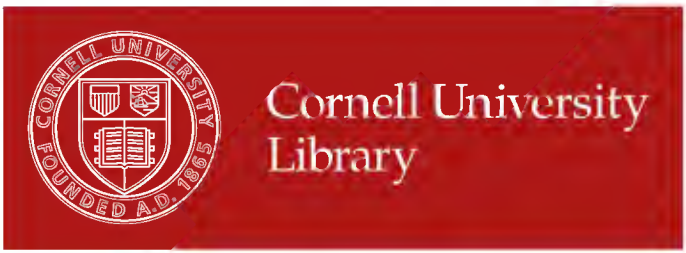
THE RETURN TO THE LAND

JULES MÉLINE

PREFACE BY JUSTIN McCARTHY



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BY

SENATOR JULES MÉLINE

LEADER OF THE MODERATE REPUBLICANS IN FRANCE; FORMER MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE; MINISTER OF COMMERCE; PREMIER

WITH A PREFACE BY

JUSTIN McCARTHY

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PREFACE

THIS book seems to me destined to make a deep mark upon the age. Senator Jules Méline, leader of the Moderate Republicans in France, was Minister of Agriculture in the Cabinet of Jules Ferry from 1883 to 1885; was elected President of the representative chamber of France in 1889; and in 1896 became Prime Minister—an office which he resigned not long after, having found probably that his political views were not radical enough for the public opinion of the country. The book is remarkable in every sense. With all its practical teaching, with its minute and careful instruction on manufacturing and industrial questions, there is not a dull page in it from first to last. M. Méline has much of the feeling of the poet as well as the reasoning power of the practical and the scientific teacher. Even where the reader may not accept all the principles of political economy on which M. Méline founds many parts of his case, that reader, if he have an appreciative mind, cannot fail to admire the sincerity, the power,

and the persuasiveness of the author. The great object of the book is to convince the world that the return to the land, and to the work which the land still offers in all or most countries, is now the nearest and the surest means for the mitigation or the removal of the troubles which have come on the working populations everywhere, and that the present is the appropriate time for the beginning of such a movement.

In his opening chapter the author tells us that the most remarkable feature of the nineteenth century is the immense development of the manufacturing industries. "Manufacture to-day," M. Méline justly declares, "is as different from what it was a hundred years ago as are our social institutions from those of the Middle Ages." Within less than half a century this great change has taken place, and M. Méline says that the change was inevitable "from the moment when science made its way upon the stage of primitive industry, ever turning until then in the same circle, ever running in the same grooves." The limits of production were naturally and inevitably fixed according to the number of men and women able to give manual labour enough in each particular region for the supply of the products which it required. The author follows out the course of this world-wide

change, or rather new development, in a series of descriptions which are no less vivid than careful and accurate. The reader who begins this volume with nothing more than a creditable desire to learn something about the development of manufacturing industry here, there, and everywhere, soon finds himself absorbed in M. Méline's exposition as much as if he were reading a story of magic from the "Thousand and One Nights." Before the recent stage of manufacturing development which belongs to our own time, England, well supplied as she was by nature with iron and with coal, should have become the foremost industrial country in the world, and by far the largest exporter of manufactured products.

I may, perhaps, become so much of a critic just here as to find some fault with M. Méline. I think that he is not quite fair to England and her governments in his manner of dealing with the effects of the famous Treaty of Commerce between this country and France. "For a moment," M. Méline says, "it seemed as though England were disposed to let France have a share in her prosperity; but we soon discovered that we had been merely the cat's-paws of our more powerful neighbour, and that, instead of finding our way into her field, it was she who

was finding her way more and more into ours." But surely it is evident that the sole reason for this result is found in the fact that England produced manufactured goods which France desired to have, and that she allowed France to have them on the easiest terms. Richard Cobden, who with Michel Chevalier, the great French economist, began and conducted the negotiations for the Treaty of Commerce, was a sincere friend of France as well as of his own country, and as the writer of this review personally knows, had the interests of France deeply at heart while he was pressing the treaty on the attention of his own government. Then with the growth of scientific machinery, came the desire among all nations, as M. Méline puts it, "to defend themselves against foreign competition" by the effort to manufacture for themselves all the goods which they most wanted, and, by import duties, to protect themselves against foreign competition. M. Méline naturally shows himself all through his volume a genuine Protectionist, but I feel well assured that the most convinced Free Trader among his readers will not feel any grudge against him merely because he stands by his own economical principles, inasmuch as through the whole of his work his evident resolve is to state with absolute fairness the facts on which

he rests his case. The universal passion for the development of native industries, and its successful working almost everywhere, led naturally and inevitably to a rivalry in exportations. The countries which were successful in this work of production soon found that they could make more goods than were needed at home, and became therefore inspired with the desire to find purchasers in foreign markets.

In this new movement the United States led the way. The States fortified themselves with prohibitory duties against other nations, while at the same time making it clear, according to my judgment, that no such protective ramparts were needed. The United States have lately become by far the largest exporters among all the countries of the world; and not only that, but their exports approach very nearly in amount, and in some industries actually exceed, the combined products of all other parts of our globe. A remarkable fact about this immense increase in American productions is that the United States have not sought out new and unoccupied markets, but have "resolutely attacked the markets of Europe—those which were already being best worked—those of France and Germany and England herself."

M. Méline also attaches much importance to

the sudden and rapid development of Japan in the promotion of its great manufacturing industries. Japan has become within the last few years almost unrivalled in her production of oil, of cotton goods, and of silk. The astonishing and utterly unexpected successes Japan made as a military power were, M. Méline declares, "merely a prelude to the economic conquests which await her, and on which she counts; for she had this in view when she undertook the war, and her struggle with Russia was but a proof of her intention to capture the Asiatic market, and to remain master of it." A new struggle is therefore opening up among the nations of the world as regards the production of manufactured goods. Such a contest must, of course, lead to depressing and even ruinous rivalries here and there, and must, M. Méline believes, bring thinking men to the conviction that there is some other element of national productiveness which must be called into development in order to maintain any permanent remedy for increasing poverty, and increasing and heedless emigration. This is the conclusion at which the author of the book arrives, and the remedy he calls for is that return to the land which gives a title to his volume. M. Méline is an enthusiast about this return to the land. He

regards the occupation and cultivation of the land in every country as one of the healthiest and most hopeful conditions in which men and women can be brought up. He lays especial stress on the improvement which can be wrought in the condition of working women everywhere by the cultivation of the land on which they live. The business of market gardening may be made not merely a profitable occupation for women, but a means of developing their intelligence, their culture, and their self-respect. While much of the mechanical work which furnishes a means of bare livelihood to the women of all our populations has often to be performed under conditions detrimental alike to physical health, and to mental and moral development, the return to the land, to the cultivation of market gardens, to the bringing-up of flowers, and the study of plants, would render woman in every sense a helpful and improving companion to man. We can hardly think of Hood's melancholy verses, "The Song of the Shirt," as likely to have any illustration to be found in woman's labour to cultivate the soil on which her husband or father was working, and on which her years since childhood have been spent.

It may not, perhaps, be altogether inappropriate here to call attention to the fact which

M. Méline would probably have invited to his aid, if he happened to remember it, that our familiar word "dairy" was originally derived from the old English word "deye," which merely signifies a maid, and which came with slight alteration to be used as a term of endearment, and thus gave us the growing young woman as the central and characteristic figure in the industrial arrangement for the production and the sale of milk and butter and cheese. Bacon says that "dairies being well housewifed are exceeding commodious," and, again, "children in dairy countries do wax more tall than where they feed more upon bread and flesh." M. Méline, indeed, gives us many illustrations of the happy contrast between the condition of women who have always been employed in farm and gardening work, and that of those who make a living for themselves, or help to make a living for their families, through their toil with the indoor work of great cities. This, of course, is only one part of our author's case, but he dwells upon it, and illuminates it with artistic, and even poetic, expressiveness. We all must admit that the crowding of rural populations, of all manner of populations, into most of our large cities and towns has an especially destructive effect upon the physical

health, and the mental and moral improvement of women.

In our own islands there has been everywhere, of late years, a clearly expressed anxiety for the accomplishment of the return to the land, and a general agreement that such a return is only to be brought about by a course of legislation, which shall make the toiler in fields the owner of the piece of land he cultivates. Conservative governments, as well as Liberal governments, have shown themselves anxious to introduce legislation with such an object. The time has happily long gone by when John Stuart Mill justly described the Irish cottier-tenant as one of the few men who could neither benefit by his own industry, nor suffer by his own improvidence. The description was literally correct at the day when Mill gave it to the world. The only result which the Irish cottier-tenant could accomplish for himself by the improvement of his farm, was to bring about an increase of his rent, and his most utter improvidence could do no worse than bring him to the workhouse, the shelter whither his industry would be just as likely to conduct him in the end. No tendency in modern opinion and in modern legislation can be more distinct than the tendency towards a system which shall create

a peasant-proprietary, and make the tiller of the soil the owner of that much of the soil which he cultivates. There is also, and has been growing up for some time, a tendency amongst civilized countries to recognize the artistic, picturesque, and poetic associations belonging to the culture of the land; the associations on which M. Méline dwells with much effect as tending so happily to the development of human education. We have seen these associations very effectively illustrated in some recent movements at home. The Garden City is not by any means a mere dream; it is already becoming in many places something like a reality. There are some splendid plans for the improvement of London itself on this principle, for the conversion of many of London's unpicturesque, squalid, and overcrowded regions into open spaces with grass and trees, and with houses and cottages not too near to stifle and darken each other, but only near enough to allow of friendly intercourse and companionship. There are also schemes for the creation of garden cities in various parts of the country, cities to be constituted mainly of homes belonging to the cultivators of the soil themselves, and not open to the indiscriminate incursion of a slum population.

M. Méline in his work gives very naturally his main attention to the condition of the rural population in France, and, of course, that is exactly the subject on which we all especially desire to have the benefit of his observation and judgment ; but the English readers will find that much of his advice has a distinct application to the development of agricultural industry now going on in Great Britain and Ireland. M. Méline is strongly of opinion that in the creation of new agricultural communities, in the construction, for instance, of garden cities, some effort should always be made to provide for the resident's greater opportunities of amusement and of genial intercourse. He feels convinced that in many of the larger villages and smaller towns the habits of the residents are injuriously affected by the absence of any such opportunities, and that men, and women as well, are drawn into the use of deleterious stimulants by mere lack of any means of occupying themselves when the actual work of the day is over. He would, therefore, encourage all harmless and healthful amusements, indoor and out-of-door, throughout the agricultural settlements of the coming time. So far as out-of-door amusements are concerned, our rural populations have, I should think, a decided advantage over those

of France; but, on the other hand, I see good reason for believing that, so far as indoor amusements are concerned, our village communities are not nearly so well equipped as those of France. We learn from M. Méline's book that an eminent French manufacturer contemplates the creation of a garden city capable of holding 6000 workers at Champagne-sur-Seine, side by side with electricity works. M. Méline, however, does not put too much faith in the reforms to be created by the formation of garden cities.

As M. Méline very fairly puts it, the garden city must always be something exceptional and isolated, and however numerous such cities may be, they can give shelter only to a small minority of the human race. It is not likely that all great manufacturers will take to the founding of such delightful refuges, or that all the garden cities actually founded are destined to prove successful. "The industrial struggle of to-day," to quote M. Méline's words, "is no idyll, and to win one's way in it it is often necessary to make the best of very unpleasant and uninviting surroundings." The great question to be considered is, as M. Méline puts it, how to lead back to the land those surplus workers who can find no employment in the cities. The relief of

the cities has to be considered as well as the cultivation of the farms. The cities ought to be relieved from the crowd of unemployed workers, and the fields ought to be supplied with a number of workers who would fain find employment there, but who know that it is hopeless under present conditions to seek any such means of making a living there.

The reader will find in this work a very faithful study of the present condition of agriculture, not only in France, which is naturally the main subject of many chapters, but also in many European countries, and in the United States, Canada, Mexico, and other lands. M. Méline argues that thus far the ministries and parliaments of too many countries have entirely neglected in legislation the rural districts in order to do everything that could be done for the towns. So far as France is concerned, M. Méline says that the explanation is quite simple. "The people in the towns constitute the most important voters, making their voices heard, and securing obedience to their wishes; and their needs are admirably served by a Press still more energetic, which flatters them in order to maintain and extend its own power, as well as by innumerable politicians vieing against each other with promises which one of

these days may have to be fulfilled." "The government," M. Méline declares, "is afraid of these powers, and does everything it can to give them satisfaction, paying little or no attention to these inarticulate peasants who are so resigned to their lot, and whose patience is so wonderful." The author here is treating only of his own country, and is not making any attack upon the government or the Press of England. I do not, from my own opportunities of observation, see any reason to believe that the ministries and the Press of Great Britain and Ireland have been wholly absorbed during recent years in studying the welfare of the citizen peoples, and have remained, or have been allowed to remain, entirely indifferent to the state of the agricultural regions and their populations. Few other subjects have occupied more attention on the part of the House of Commons during recent years than the many questions of land settlement which have come up for discussion; and, indeed, I should be rather inclined to say that, while the public in general may have given much attention to the troubles caused by the overcrowding of cities, the ministries and parliaments have not shown adequate energy in the efforts to supply some remedy for those evils. It may be said,

however, that the efforts to solve either question, if carried out at once with courage and discretion, must directly tend to the solving of the other. The study of M. Méline's work helps of itself to make this fact more and more clear. One inestimable benefit which must come from the return to the land would be the relief of the overcrowded cities; and the relief of the overcrowded cities would find its best and readiest means of accomplishment by the opening up of new occupation for workers on the land. Thus there ought to be no serious likelihood of any antagonism between town and country concerning this great movement for the re-occupation of the land. He who helps the one cause helps the other cause—that much at least is quite certain.

M. Méline concludes his task by declaring that to ameliorate the lot of the working-classes, and ward off the dangers which are impending, there is but one thing to do, and that is "to provide them with new fields of labour by sending them back to the land." M. Méline sums up at the close of his final chapter the solution of the problem before us "which may be said to be merely an expansion of a profound thought uttered long ago by a Chinese philosopher—a thought which should be inscribed upon the

walls of our schools in letters of gold—'The well-being of a people is like a tree; agriculture is its root, manufacture and commerce are its branches and leaves; if the root is injured the leaves fall, the branches break away, and the tree dies.'"

I have thus set forth—and sometimes, to the great advantage of my readers, in M. Méline's own words, at least in the English translation of them—the main purposes of a work which cannot fail to come in for world-wide attention and even study. I have not made any attempt to describe the methods by which the author believes that the results which he hopes for can be accomplished, the manner in which State guidance and State aid can be given to such a movement, the specifics for the regulation of foreign competition among the nations of the earth, the means of remedying or relieving the troubles brought about by seasons of agricultural distress, and all the many other difficulties in the way of that return to the land which the author regards as the only possible panacea for some of humanity's troubles. M. Méline's book must be carefully read and studied if its purpose is to be thoroughly appreciated, and no mere summary of its pages given by an outsider could possibly render justice to it. The greater part of the book is, of course, occupied with the

land question as it is working itself out in France, and in which there are many operating conditions, conditions alike of climate, of usage, and of law, which naturally do not find their exact parallel in all or in any other countries; but, as I have already said, the author appears to have made a deep study of the agricultural question as it presents itself in many other countries as well as in his own, and the manner in which he proposes that his project should be worked out will be found worthy of study in every country where the claims of manufacturing and agricultural industry are coming into competition. I have made these comments mainly because it occurred to me that some English readers might be discouraged by discovering early in the book that its author was dealing for the most part with French conditions. Any reader who may feel thus discouraged at the outset will find, if he perseveres, that although the volume is mainly French in its descriptions and its horizon, yet the main purpose of the author may be appreciated, and his proposals turned to good account under whatever skies and amid whatever legalized conditions. M. Méline's views on economic questions are sometimes at entire variance with my own, but I hope that I am not in any sense disqualified

by that fact from rendering full justice to the general objects of the great movement which the author invites, and indeed regards as inevitable. M. Méline is conservative enough in his views to satisfy the best regulated of British Conservative minds, and he tells us himself that "the spirit of the French peasant contains treasures of good sense and right thinking which will strengthen it against the sophisms of the revolutionary school, and save it from the perilous adventures into which socialism would tempt it." Furthermore, he assures us that "The return to the land will not be brought about by violent and empirical measures, but scientifically, and by men of good will working in concord and unity for the ordering of the products of the nation in harmony and proportion."

Such is the vision of the future which M. Méline opens up to our eyes. It is indeed an idyllic and a fascinating picture. An English poet laments for the day, "Ere England's griefs began, when every rood of ground maintained its man." There is no precise definition of the historical period described as the time "ere England's griefs began," and one may well be inclined to believe that with the very beginning of every people some griefs must already have been foreshadowed. But without entering into any

consideration of that question, it must seem to most of us an ideal time when every rood of ground shall be able to maintain its man, and the return to the land, which M. Méline sees in prospect, is to enable the land to maintain its working woman also in prosperity and self-respect. Such a period, indeed, when the cities shall no longer be overcrowded, and vast spaces of land now uncultivated although with a half-starving peasantry striving to maintain a living, there shall be divided among the ownership of hard-working, intelligent, and prosperous peasant proprietors, must seem to most of us like a return of the golden age. It must also be borne in mind that M. Méline, although with many poetic touches in his style, is not a poet or a mere idealist, but a practical and scientific thinker, an experienced statesman, who has studied his question thoroughly, and has satisfied himself that the condition of things he foresees can be established by improved legislation, and by the influence of healthful co-operation. It is true that the book now published has mainly to do with the land and the agricultural populations of France, but we all know that the depressing conditions which he shows us as existing in France, are even still the actual and the common experience of most or all of the other countries

of our modern world. We may, therefore, reasonably assume that if the happy solution of the hitherto unsolved problem can be accomplished in France, it may also be accomplished with at least equal success in our own countries. The period is specially favourable for the beginning in sober, serious earnest of such a result by the adaptation of our existing laws to the purpose of bringing about the return to the land. The idea has of late been taking a firm hold on the minds of all thinking men and women. I have already pointed out that the state of the Irish peasantry is even now showing how much can be done for the cultivation of the soil and for the comfort of its workers by the legislative measures which even Conversative ministeries have helped to introduce, and which half a century ago our legislators would have regarded as utterly impracticable, and also as monstrously unjust to the ruling landlords, whose arbitrary and seignorial rights such measures sought to abolish.

I may say for myself, that I feel all the greater satisfaction when I remember that the plans and the predictions of our author come from a man who in many of his economic principles does not accept the doctrines of most of the British public. If M. Méline can see his way

to such results, how easy ought to be their accomplishment in a country like England, which is for the most part in full harmony with the doctrines of men like Richard Cobden and John Bright. The truth is, that the great principles which M. Méline advocates, have a far wider scope than can be surveyed and comprehended within the mere limitations of this or that economic school. We must keep before our minds steadily, to begin with, that the two great objects we have in view are the relief of the cities from the superabundance of populations striving hopelessly to obtain a living where the population is already superabundant, and the restoration to the uncultivated land of that independent peasant proprietorship which alone can save it from lying waste. As I read this volume it is a pleading, first of all, for the peasant ownership of the piece of land which the peasant cultivates, and therefore a diffusion of that skilful and intelligent labour which can make the cultivation of the land a benefit and a blessing to the poor toiler as well as to the lord of the soil. The "Return to the Land" seems to me sure of a welcome among the intelligent and the progressive states and nations of the world.

JUSTIN MCCARTHY.

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INTRODUCTION

THE century just closed must rank always as one of the most marvellous periods in the history of the world. So far-reaching are the transformations it has brought about, we may say without hyperbole that it has moulded the world anew. To attempt to take stock of what has happened during even the latter half of it, is to stand amazed at all that has been swept away and all that has been ushered in. Such metamorphoses have been wrought in the life alike of society and of the individual, that it seems almost like a dream when one goes back in mind to the days of one's youth.

The further past is rich in great events, and every century has its distinguishing mark; no two are alike, yet there is a family resemblance between all. They seem to grow out of each other in a natural process of evolution.

With the nineteenth century — above all, with its close — the scene changes suddenly, and we find ourselves in an unknown land. There would seem to have been a break in the evolutionary process. In less than fifty years everything is turned upside down —manufacture, agriculture, commerce, methods of transport, everything. It is nothing less than a revolution we find in progress, carrying all things along with it like a torrent.

To cause and consummate this revolution, all that was needed was the appearance upon the scene of a new force, until then little talked of — science. In a moment science gave a new aspect to everything—the whole world had to keep pace with her. Ever since, we have been going at a gallop— a breathless gallop that prevents us from seeing where we are.

Now there is danger in this headlong career —the danger of our coming croppers over the obstacles we cannot foresee. The present would seem, therefore, to be a fitting moment to call a halt in order to look around and ahead, and to take note of the far-reaching transformation that is going on.

The purpose of my book is to examine into

the actual facts of this transformation, to set forth impartially the good and the ill that it has entailed, to ascertain whither it is leading us, and to discover the means of turning it to the best interests of mankind.

THE
GROWTH OF MANUFACTURE

CHAPTER I

THE GROWTH OF MANUFACTURE

I

THE outstanding feature of the nineteenth century is the immense development of the manufacturing industries. Manufacture to-day is as different from what it was a hundred years ago, as are our social institutions from those of the Middle Ages. In less than half a century it has sprung up like a colossal tree, drawing to itself all the living forces of the world.

It was inevitable that this change should take place, from the moment when science made its way upon the stage of primitive industry, ever turning, until then, in the same circle, ever running in the same grooves. There being available only enough manual labour to work the inadequate and inefficient machinery of those days, the limits of production were always fixed by the number of arms in existence and their strength or weakness. There were no captains

of industry at this period—only master workers living in the midst of their small body of apprentices, like fathers among their children. There was no such thing as competition in the present meaning of the word, and over-production was unknown. Every workshop depended upon its neighbouring *clientèle*, and knew exactly the extent of its needs; the difficulty of communication and the cost of transfer had the effect of securing every industrial concern its own markets, capable of keeping it going peacefully and without anxiety.

The history of modern manufacture begins with the wonderful inventions which have substituted machinery for the arms, and even the brains, of the workers; and which, by means of rapid and inexpensive transport, have brought all the markets of the world into touch, making one great common market of them all.

Let us see through what successive stages the manufacturing industries have passed on their way to the position in which we find them now. We can divide their history into three separate periods corresponding to three quite distinct stages.

II

The first period begins with the adaptation of science to industry, the employment of steam-engines and the introduction of mechanical labour resulting in the gradual elimination of workmen. It is obvious that the nation destined to profit at the start by this revolution must be the one best supplied by nature with iron, the material for the machines, and with coal, their daily bread. It was inevitable, therefore, that England, so richly endowed in both respects, should take the lead and become the foremost industrial country; it was only natural, moreover, that, having no rival in a condition to compete with her, she should have secured all the markets and become a sort of universal provider to the world.

During this first period, England wears the aspect of a giant capable of crushing all coalitions, and she is so assured of being all-powerful that she equips herself as though she must retain this ascendency for ever. Her glory extends to the confines of the globe, and she lords it over all the markets of Europe, Asia, and the New World, distributing her enormous output in every direction; she seems to have

a real monopoly, and all the other nations seem resigned to her mastery.

For a moment it seemed as though she were disposed to let France have a share, but the illusions born of the famous treaties of 1860 were not long-lived; we soon discovered that we had been merely the cat's-paws for our more powerful neighbour, and that, instead of finding our way into her field, it was she who was finding her way more and more into ours. Our principal industries, taught by sharp experience, came to the conclusion at last that contest with an adversary so well-armed was impossible, and gave out a cry of alarm, which was only silenced by the downfall of the Empire.

We come now to our second period, following upon the year 1870.

III

After 1870, a sudden change begins to operate in the economic condition of Europe, and finishes by extending over every part of the world.

All the great nations evince their intention to shake off the industrial yoke of England, and to create, each on its own territory, manufactures capable of ministering to home needs. To defend themselves against foreign competition

and facilitate the establishment of these industries, all these countries without exception fortified themselves behind a tariff of import duties. "We have no need of the foreigner," was the *mot d'ordre*, "we are self-sufficing."

To be self-sufficing—that is the ideal which inspires and dominates the economic *régime* of most nations. That this should come about was inevitable, and England ought to have foreseen it. What could be more natural than that a nation should seek to provide for its own needs instead of calling upon the foreigner to supply them? Charity, well-administered, begins at home—is not that the A B C of economic science? You may censure and deplore as much as you please what you may regard as a narrow point of view, a lack of high principle in commercial life, but it would be *naïf* to show surprise at it. How could any one nation lay claim to a right to be a provider to all the others, and to prevent them from emancipating themselves by establishing industries of their own? "It is sheer stupidity," say free traders, "to persist in buying dear at home what you can get so cheap from abroad." "Possibly," the nation interested may reply, "but I prefer to give my money to my working classes rather than to foreigners, first of all because it gives them their

living, secondly because it remains in the country and benefits my entire population instead of my neighbours."

It is easy to understand how the new idea made its way everywhere, its opponents becoming fewer and fewer every day. After Germany, which opened the ball, Austria, Russia, France, Spain, Italy, and Switzerland joined in. The whole of Europe, save for England and, to a certain extent, Belgium, drew up tariffs and protection became universal.

Thus it was that all the European markets became closed against England, and that she found herself obliged to seek new openings elsewhere for her immense production. She had recourse to America, Asia, and Africa, and for some years she met with all the success she could desire and imagined herself saved; but it was not long before she aroused in these regions also the same feeling of independence that had been evoked in Europe, combined with the same instinct of self-preservation.

America was the first to enter into line with European nations, doing so impetuously and with a sublime disregard for all obstacles in the way, bringing into her economic reforms all the practical spirit and the tenacity of the Anglo-Saxon race, together with the bellicose ardour of

a young people confident of its destinies. Burning its boats and leaving to elderly Europe the prudent formulas of a modified protection, she took up her stand on the ground of prohibition. All the economists laughed at her, and predicted that she would stifle behind her Great Wall of China, and would soon have to call out for mercy. She let them talk, continued to keep herself closed off, and thus succeeded in establishing upon her soil all those industries we now see capable of ministering to the needs of her ever-growing population.*

The first consequence of this step on the part of the United States was the abolition of Europe's principal market for manufactured goods — a *clientèle* of eighty millions. It was hard to see how the European industries would recover from the blow. It was a significant warning for them in any case, and a little reflection should have sufficed to make them realize that the hour for great ambitions had passed, and that the most elementary prudence bade them slacken their pace and beware of over-production.

They might well have foreseen, from this moment, another danger not less inevitable—the

* The United States produced, in 1899, 13,000,000 tons of cast-iron—that is to say, more than all the rest of the world produced in 1870 (12,000,000).

danger that the Americans, with their headstrong temperament, would not stop half-way, but would go to extremes in their economical development by becoming exporters in their turn, and endeavouring, like England, to invade the whole world. They have succeeded in this with a dizzying rapidity which is marvellous; in a few short years they have taken their place among the great exporting countries, and the results obtained are almost beyond belief.*

Let us leave on one side the exportation of agricultural products and raw materials, because we shall be told that this kind of export is a necessity and a benefit to the importing countries. Let us speak only of manufactured products. To estimate these, it may suffice to say that during the last decade they have augmented at the rate of 146 per cent., while the increase in the export of agricultural products amounted only to 36 per cent.

The strange and disquieting thing about this

* The total exports of the United States passed from $4,130,000,000 in 1890, to $7,288,000,000 in 1903, an increase of 76 per cent. There was a slight decrease in 1904, owing to the general crisis, and it came down to $7,128,000,000.

American exports to England have increased at the rate of 127 per cent. during the last twenty-three years; to India at the rate of 126 per cent.; to British North America at the rate of 322 per cent. During the last few years American imports have, it should be added, been increasing noticeably.

colossal expansion is that America has not sought out new, unoccupied markets, as might have been supposed; she has resolutely attacked the markets of Europe—those which were already being best worked—those of France and Germany and England herself.

In 1903, the exports of the United States amounted to $1,013,000,000, whereas those of all the rest of the world came to only $1,458,000,000.*

* To form a just idea of the vast aspirations of the United States, and of their belief in themselves, one should read in its entirety an article published a few years ago in *Scribner's Magazine*, from the pen of an American of high standing in finance, Mr. Vanderlip, assistant secretary to the Treasury. "Formerly," says Mr. Vanderlip, "America was the great exporter of cereals and raw material, and Europe the great workshop in which these products were turned to account. Now the *rôles* are changed; our exports of industrial products increase from day to day, to such a degree that the figures reached during the last three years justify the nervousness now evinced in Europe regarding our industrial invasion. The exportation of manufactured articles during the years 1889–1897 amounted to $163,000,000 on an average, in 1898 it amounted to $290,000,000, in 1899 to $333,000,000, and in 1900 to $434,000,000. This ever-increasing exportation has been accompanied by a corollary phenomenon: the rejection by our own markets of foreign industrial products. America is becoming more and more a self-sufficing country; our industry is gaining more and more the mastery of the international market."

To give to the above sentences their full significance, Mr. Vanderlip proceeds to base upon them the following prophecy: "The more industrial products we supply to other countries,

Not content with making themselves independent of Europe and then depriving Europe of some portion of her own home markets, the United States are now laying siege to those markets further afield, which Europe used to dominate—dethroning her in South America, in China, and even in Canada, where they are pursuing England into her last intrenchments.

It might have been supposed that after the United States no other competitor would venture to enter the lists, and that the general economic situation was now settled for good and all. What, then, was the general consternation when, a few years ago, a small people who had not been given much thought, and who were considered half-savage, suddenly emerged from their shell (after a slow period of incubation that had not been much observed by the sleepy eyes of European diplomacy), and speedily won for themselves a place in the front rank of industrial races, pending the moment when they were to take a similar position amongst great military powers: I speak of Japan.

It was so recently as 1897 that Japan, following the example of the United States, set about

the less they will be able to manufacture themselves; and certain enthusiasts already foresee the day when America will be the great provider for the entire world."

reforming its customs and became resolutely protectionist. In a moment almost it had established great industries on its own soil, borrowing from Europe her industrial science and her most perfected machinery. Once started, Japan never looked back, and the results of her action are prodigious: in 1895, she could boast only 518,000 spindles for cotton; in 1902 she possessed 1,400,000. Her production of oil, which did not exceed 3,000,000 tuns in 1893, amounted in 1901 to 8,000,000. From having been merely an importer, she became suddenly one of the most formidable of exporters: her general exports rose from 25,000,000 yen in 1898 to 289,000,000 in 1903. Her exports of cotton goods, which amounted to 63,000,000 francs in 1902, amounted in the following year to 101,000,000. As regards silk, her progress was still more remarkable. Her silk exports in 1903 reached the enormous figure of 289,000,000 francs.

This movement of expansion will not stop there; the wonderful successes which established Japan as a great military power were merely a prelude to the economic conquests which await her, and on which she counts; for she had this in view when she undertook the war, and her struggle with Russia was but a proof of her intention to capture the Asiatic

market and to remain master of it. The great nations of Europe, which looked on benevolently at Japan's attack upon gigantic Russia, and which rejoiced in secret over Russia's humiliation, will learn one day to their cost that jealousy is an evil counsellor, and that they have been favouring the game of the most formidable of all their competitors. The same may be said of the United States, which at one time hugged the notion of being Japan's provider, and which soon will find themselves not only driven out of this market, but ousted also from the huge market in China, of which they also dreamed.

One would have to be blind not to see that Japan is preparing to play the same economic *rôle* in the Extreme East that Germany played in Europe after 1870, with this difference, which ensures her expansion—an advantage over Germany—that she is as inaccessible and invulnerable as England by reason of her insular position.

The war in Manchuria, as she regarded it, was merely her first application of a new Monroe Doctrine for the Yellow Race. She considers herself called upon to take her place as leader of this race, and take it she will: her victories over the white race have assured her an irresistible ascendency over it.

It seems probable that she will not abuse her power just at first, and that she will not push her military advantages too far for fear of compromising them, and of provoking a general coalition against her. She will doubtless content herself with organising the warlike elements of China just as she organised her own, and with holding them in leash ready to let loose whenever the hour for the great struggle with the white races shall have sounded, and she shall feel herself strong enough to brave the entire world. Until then she will content herself with the *rôle* of commercial invader—invading without scruple.

On this field she is in a position to challenge the strongest with even greater sense of security, and there is none fit to try conclusions with her. Labour costs her nothing, her working-classes are intelligent, industrious, artistic, and very docile; her captains of industry, taught in the leading schools and the greatest establishments in Europe, are qualified to lead the great masses just as her generals were qualified to lead their troops. As to her plant, it is as good as her armaments—it is all on the latest model and above criticism.

Japan, therefore, is in a better condition for producing than either Europe or America, and

as the Chinese *clientèle* is at her gate, stretching out its hands to her, and ready to give her preference over all competitors, there can scarcely be any doubt as to her eventual victory, and it is probable that before long she will be in command of a market of 400,000,000 consumers.

So great a revolution will never have been witnessed since the beginning of the world, and it is very late now to attempt to arrest it. And Europe has not lacked warnings—warnings have come, indeed, from every direction. In France, the Yellow Peril has been foretold long since by M. Edmond Théry, one of the first to foretell it at all; and M. Théry foresaw only the economic peril which now goes hand in hand with the peril to national existence. He foretold the economic all-powerfulness of this over-ambitious race, whose growth was almost visible to the naked eye, and which threatened all others with commercial extinction. His predictions are in a fair way to fulfilment, unless Europe, awaking from her lethargy and forgetting all points of difference, succeeds in finding some way of combining for the protection of her vantage points in Asia and of presenting an insuperable barrier to the yellow invasion. The battle is not yet lost; but mistakes must not be committed, and time must not be lost.

IV

Having now outlined the economic chart of the world, let us examine it a little more closely, and try to see into the future. It is manifest that the advent upon the scene of the United States and Japan, pending that of Canada, have turned completely upside down the industrial situation in this old Europe of ours, and what is pitiable is that Europe does not seem to realize it. She orders her production as though nothing had changed all round her, as though she were still mistress of her destinies.

Yet the merest common sense should warn her to be on her guard. In face of this universal movement towards industrialism which has not yet said its last word *—this world-wide

* Every year sees some new nation take a step towards its industrial emancipation. Mexico is now advancing with great strides, and gaining ground every day. In the cotton industry it possesses already 1,450,000 spindles, and 25,000 looms (?); in 1902 it counted already more than 6,000 industrial establishments, giving occupation to 177,000 persons.

Soon Canada, in her turn, will enter upon the scene, and we may look for an expansion in her case analogous to that of the United States; a land which produces already 250,000 tons of cast-iron cannot stay its progress.

Even the seemingly most backward European nations are beginning now to fall in with the universal tendency. Thus Hungary, essentially an agricultural country, is manifesting its

competition which she has now to meet—she ought to see that her ambitions should be controlled. She closes her eyes to this, however, and does not even concentrate her energies upon those particular articles of trade in which she has some speciality, and the market for which she might hope to retain.

It is only right to say that Germany is primarily responsible for this onward progress. Exalted by her proud position in the world, carried along by her scientists and engineers and financiers, and by her Government as well, it was she who gave the first impulse to the movement. The other nations have but followed in her wake.

Her early successes were dazzling, and the progress she made in a few years was marvellous. It is true that the wealth of her natural resources, for so long lying fallow, justified her ambitions. Her coal mines, which contain reserves as great as, if not greater than, those of England, and her iron mines, which produce excellent material for her foundries, enabled her to establish

intention of withdrawing its custom as a purchaser from Austria, and of setting up industries of its own. With the help of bonuses granted by the Hungarian Government, 96 new manufactories were started in the country in the first three months of 1904. Four of these were of paper, ten of chemical products ; eight were ironworks.

metal industries that competed favourably for all the markets of the world. She has added chemical works which have won her a veritable monopoly in this direction, so far in advance are they of any others elsewhere; her annual trade in chemical goods alone amounts to the enormous figure of 1,400,000,000 marks.

Its total exportation increased between 1903 and 1904 by over 30 per cent.*

But if Germany is at the head of European nations as regards the enormous total of her exports, she is not now going ahead the fastest. During the period 1890–1904, the exports of Italy increased at the rate of 63 per cent., those of Russia 57 per cent., Belgium 43 per cent., Switzerland 26 per cent., France 19 per cent., England 15 per cent., Austria 13 per cent.

What is the meaning of this unless it be that the productive countries of Europe have been led, one after another, into the universal movement, and that each of them, having first made sure of a home market, has made efforts

* In the metal industry, Germany is establishing her supremacy more and more in place of that of England. Between the years 1892 and 1902, Germany's metal exportation for Europe, England included, increased by 72 per cent., while that of England for Europe, Germany included, decreased by 43 per cent.

in its turn to poach upon the *clientèle* of the others and to get a footing on foreign markets?

It is possible to see clearly now the course that was taken by the great economic contest of less than fifteen years ago between the strongest nations. Two new giants stand face to face, the United States and Germany, and while fighting against each other, they fight together against England. They dump down deluges of cheap goods in their efforts to snatch markets. The other nations, instead of avoiding danger by restricting their production, keep producing ever more and more, in the mad hope of crushing their competitors. Each moves forward blindly; the one question they never ask themselves is, whether there be consumers enough to justify their prodigality of production. This is thought of only when the industrial crisis has begun to rage everywhere, and to endanger even the most flourishing industries.

We arrive, then, at our third period, into which we came a few years ago, and which may, perhaps, be designated as the period of overproduction and swollen markets.

THE
INDUSTRIAL CONGESTION

CHAPTER II

THE INDUSTRIAL CONGESTION

I

WE do not close our eyes to the fact that the very existence of this evil of over-production is denied. We are asked to produce scientific proofs of what we assert.

It must be admitted that scientific proofs are not easily forthcoming. To adduce them we should need to know the exact proportions borne to each other by the world's supply and demand. As yet we can only put our hand upon statistics serving to give us some idea of the amount of the supply.

The first tables of statistics to which we may give our attention are those setting forth the total output for the world of certain industries which may be regarded as a barometer to all the others—an almost exact indicator to the development of those industries which depend upon them. The first is that of the collieries; coal constituting the motive power which keeps

industry alive, it is easy to deduce from the extent of the output the degree of industrial development that is attained.

Upon this point, as upon so many others, we may get our information from the *Office International d'Anvers*, which was established for the purpose of drawing up statistics of the production of industry and of the progress of trade all over the world; we shall have occasion to borrow more than once from its interesting pages. The following are the figures it gives for coal:—

1870	...	...	203,000,000 tons.
1890	...	...	469,000,000 „
1900	...	...	694,000,000 „
1902	...	...	749,000,000 „

What I have said of coal may also be said of iron, also the raw material of countless industries.

The firm of James Watson and Co., of Glasgow, has recently published statistics of the production of iron in all parts of the world in 1903. From these it appears that the amount went up from 39,000,000 tons in 1901, to 43,000,000 in 1902, and nearly 46,000,000 in 1903; an increase of 15 per cent. in three years. Germany's output alone increased within this period 25 per cent.

These years mark the beginning of the

tendency towards over-production. The exceptional number of great public works just then under construction combined with the development of electric railways to provoke such an immense demand that the workshops could not meet it. The grave error was then made of imagining that a condition of things which was only temporary and accidental would become permanent, and of proceeding to produce as though the general consumption had become doubled.

A still more extraordinary thing came about: the industrial revival did not stop short at metallurgy, which alone came in for the exceptional demands. The other industries, infected by example, carried away by the high price of coal, took it into their heads that the consumption of their products also would go up tremendously, and that we were on the verge of an unparalleled season of permanent good trade. The textile industries especially began to expand everywhere, new factories springing up as though by magic out of the earth. The illusion was made all the greater because our Exhibition of 1900, which was so brilliant and did so much to reveal the marvellous progress of technical industry, gave a fillip to consumption; it was merely a fillip, unfortunately, as

was only too evident presently. A moment's reflection ought to have sufficed to make us reflect that consumption, especially nowadays, does not make these leaps forward, and that if it progresses it progresses slowly; and that if it becomes surfeited, there is a tendency to relapse.

The result of the imprudence was that the great industrial countries, finding on their hands a large surplus of merchandise, for which they had no use, were forced to export it at any price they could secure in order to avoid such a "slump" internally, accompanied by stoppage of work, as might give rise to an alarming social crisis.

II

This is the only explanation that can be given of the quite abnormal exports which have marked the last few years, and which constitute an economic event deserving of the most serious attention, for it affects all countries equally. There is no surer indication of the importance of the production of a country and of its economic development, especially in the case of great industries such as those of metals and textiles, than these sudden increases in the

amount of their exports. For in these cases what do the exports consist of if not of the surplus stock for which no market can be found at home, and which must therefore be disposed of abroad?

I do not mean that exports are always and everywhere synonymous with over-production. There are normal exports consisting of merchandise provided specially for the foreigner. Until recently these were the only kind of exports at all. That was as long as we were still working foreign markets which bid against each other for certain classes of goods to such an extent that the demand often exceeded the supply.

Things have been changing, however, and now the great industries regard exports as merely a method of disposing of their surplus stocks; when the home market is active and buying largely they diminish or suspend their exports, as we have seen of late years in the United States, where the metal industry, finding its enormous output entirely taken up for the construction of railways, etc., ceased exporting altogether for a time until the home demand had been satisfied.

The distinguishing mark of these exports, generally speaking, is the fact that they are effected in great bulk and at very low prices—

"liquidation exports" they have been designated not incorrectly. It is notorious that of recent years exports of this kind have been the chief figure in the commercial statistics of the great producing countries.*

If only one market, or only a few markets, were glutted at a time, the economic equilibrium would soon be re-established by the flow of the surplus output upon the markets in good condition; but it has sometimes happened that all the great markets have been glutted simultaneously. No need to describe the prodigious effort, and the enormous sacrifices made by each country to get the better of the others. Trusts, cartels, industrial unions, have been found indispensable, if superficial, methods of saving the situation.

Having, then, established the truth of the fact, that the advance in exports is a sure index to the home production of a country, let us see

* The very nature of these exports proves the truth of what is said above. It is to be noted that they consist chiefly of merchandise universally in demand and such as most countries can produce for themselves, and that they go to markets which could quite well dispense with them. There can, for instance, be no doubt that when Germany sends her cast-iron to Belgium, Great Britain, and the United States, it is not because these countries are unable to produce enough for their own use, it is because the German market is glutted and must be eased at any price.

now what our commercial statistics have to tell us upon this point. Thanks to the Antwerp Statistical Bureau, we have the advantage of being put in possession of them all for the whole world, and are able, therefore, to form a precise notion of the course of production during the last few years. Here are the figures for the entire world for the years 1897, 1902, and 1903.

		Francs.
Total Exports in 1897	...	46,000,000,000
„ „ 1902	...	56,000,000,000
„ „ 1903	...	60,000,000,000

If we bear in mind the fact that the year 1902 was one of the most calamitous for industries of every description, the significance of this advance of 4000 millions in a single year will come home to us;* it enables us to form some notion of the increase of the world's production, but only a faint and quite inadequate notion. All it tells us of is the surplus stock which could not be utilized. It gives us no idea of the increase in the home production consumed internally. This must have exceeded very

* For Europe alone the total exports, amounting in 1875 to only 22,000,000,000 francs, had reached 34,000,000,000 in 1902—an increase of 12,000,000,000 in twenty-seven years; but in 1903 there was a further advance to 36,800,000,000. In the light of these figures, the industrial crisis does not seem surprising.

considerably the records of previous years, judging from the statistics of certain individual industries.

I ought not to seem to minimize, however, the total increase of 14,000 millions for the seven years — an increase representing the growth of what I may call the floating world's merchandise, inasmuch as it floats about in search of an outlet.

No one would venture to contend seriously that in this short space of time the normal consumption of the world had developed in proportion. The increase in the world's population, which is sometimes invoked by way of explaining matters, does not warrant any such theory; its rate of advance is infinitely more slow and regular.*

Nor can it be maintained that the advance in general prosperity—an important factor in regard to consumption—suffices to explain so rapid a rise in production. Prosperity also progresses regularly, not by leaps and bounds; to satisfy ourselves of this, we have but to examine the statistics of the wealth of the different nations.

* According to the statistics, which seem to be most carefully compiled and most trustworthy in every way—those made out by our great French statistician, M. Levasseur—the population of the world in 1878, was 1,439,000,000; in 1890, 1,483,000,000; in 1904, 1,523,000,000.

Nowhere except in the United States* can we find record of any such extraordinary advance in the condition of the well-to-do; as for the worker, he is doubtless better housed and better fed than formerly, and able to afford pleasures unknown to his class fifty years ago, but in 1900 he was in very much the same state that he is in now.

Therefore no other explanation can be given of the extraordinary increase of exports than the fact that most of the markets are glutted as a result of over-production.

III

The Germans recognize this fact, and we must do them the justice of admitting that, after being one of the chief causes of the industrial crisis, they are now seeking to repair their fault. As soon as they realized that their excess of production threatened them with an imminent crash, they made efforts to save their market by empirical methods: they organized their *cartels* with the utmost possible astuteness.

Thanks to their tariff, which enabled them to

* The wealth of the United States, estimated at 42,000,000,000 dollars in 1880, rose in 1900 to 94,000,000,000; this works out at 1235 dollars a head instead of 850.

raise their prices for their home market, they were able to levy "drawbacks" which for a certain time gave them an incontestable advantage over all their rivals. The mechanism of "dumping" is too well known to need any enlargement upon it here, and a discussion of this subject would take us too far. I confine myself, therefore, to adducing the phenomenon of these *cartels*,* as a striking proof of the excess of production in Germany.

But the German manufacturers, who are essentially practical men, realized presently that this kind of wholesale pouring out of exports was only a temporary expedient, and not a remedy. It relieved the glutted market for the time being, but if the over-production were to be kept up, if stocks were to be replenished as quickly as they were thus disposed of, the evil would become endemic, and there would be no issue to the crisis.

Thus they were brought to the conclusion that, sooner or later, when the home market

* It is thanks to these *cartels*, as I have said, that the exports of iron from Germany for Europe alone have increased to 72 per cent., while those from England have decreased by 43 per cent. The German exports to other countries, not including the United States, have increased from 1,544,000 tons in 1897 to 2,000,000 tons in 1902.

became congested a limit must be put upon production. All other measures are mere palliatives.

In order to effect this, they again had recourse to *cartels* for the regulation of production, reducing it to a certain fixed degree, and distributing it among the various syndicated establishments. This division is carried out with perfect equity according to the productive capacity of the factories and to the state of the market; each manufacturer knows in advance the limit assigned to him, and he has no temptation to go beyond it.

German industry has just taken a still more daring step in this direction—a step which no one could have foreseen. Not content with thus checking manufacturers at home, it has quite recently put forward proposals for an understanding with its most redoubtable rivals abroad.

This is no news. Every one is aware to-day that the German steel *cartel* (Stahlwerkband) has invited the English, Belgian, and French manufacturers of steel rails, girders, etc., to come to an understanding by which each nation contracting would limit its participation in the exporting of these articles to a certain fixed figure, the factories of each country preserving, of course, their individuality and independence. The understanding has now been

definitely come to, and it is believed that it will presently take in the United States.

This new species of combination is certainly one of the most important economical events of the last few years. There is no need to inquire as to the results which it has had upon the industries affected, and which cannot but be favourable. If we have devoted so much attention to it, that is because it supplies us with the strongest argument in support of our thesis.

This *entente*, to which the most powerful industrial nations in the world found themselves obliged to come, is surely the most striking proof of the general state of over-production. It is a recognition that there is no longer room for every one on the export markets, and that the wisest course is to come to terms and to reduce the supply of merchandise to the demand.

From all this we are forced to the conclusion that the upward tendency of industrial production will soon cease, and that production will be kept afterwards within the limits imposed by consumption.

It is because we foresee this inevitable evolution that we wish to help it by preparing the passage from one state of things to another,

and by seeking means to cope with the untoward effects it may bring about in other fields of labour.

IV

But, as we have said, our thesis is challenged by many people, and we must pass under review the objections they advance.

First of all, there are the persistent optimists who are not to be alarmed by anything, and attribute all crises to the nature of the laws of economy, or who rather deny the existence of any crisis at all, and hold that over-production is merely the bogey of ill-ordered minds. The proof that it is a phantom, they tell us, is to be found in the fact that everything that is produced is sold, and that there are purchasers always for everything; there has never been a case of merchandise being thrown into the sea for lack of buyers.

Doubtless, the producers will always prefer to sell cheap rather than not at all, but it is also certain that consumers are not always to be tempted by mere cheapness. It is upon this disastrous delusion that rest the wholesale exports, which have been becoming so general. If industry is to be carried on upon such lines, so

be it; but don't let it be denied that over-production exists, for these low prices are proof positive of the fact.

When production is normal and in accordance with the needs of consumption, the consumer runs after the producer, who is master of the situation, and sees to it that the price paid shall yield him his due profits. When, on the contrary, it exceeds the needs of consumption, it is the producer who has to run after the consumer, offering his goods at a reduction, in order to have the advantage of his competitors; underselling becomes a regular thing, trade goes to the bad. This is all inevitable—an economic law which no one can hope to escape.

And this law has been manifesting itself now for twenty years with painful persistency; it has been set out in relief by a great English statistician, Mr. Sauerbeck, who for thirty years and more has been devoting his powerful intellect to a study of the oscillation of the different markets, noting their movements day by day, and embodying the result of his observations in formulæ of great interest and the utmost precision.

In order to put his conclusions intelligibly before the general public, scarcely *au courant* with such abstruse problems, he has selected

in his classification of merchandise those which do the biggest trade by reason of their universal utility. He takes forty-five of these, and begins by establishing their average price for the period 1869 to 1877—the period preceding the great industrial movement of the end of the nineteenth century. He makes this average price the basis of his further calculations, by representing it by the figure 100, above and below which he watches the rise and fall of the value of these goods month by month and year by year.

If you want to take note of the general trend of prices since 1877, you need only take the extreme figures, the first figure of all, the average between 1869 and 1877, and the figure for 1904. There is a fall there from 100 to 70—a decrease of 30 per cent. It is only right to point out that, in the interval, prices have varied considerably, going down in 1896 and 1897 to 61 and 62, rising in 1900 to 75 and going down again to 69 in 1902 and 1903. But these oscillations themselves do but confirm the general law that we are endeavouring to establish; on the one hand, the constant downward tendency for the last twenty-five years, on the other hand, the coincidence of low prices with over-production.

But, it will be said, you are overlooking two

essential factors, which explain the inevitable lowering of prices, quite apart from any question of over-production: the growing cheapness of raw material and the progress of machinery. We admit the existence of both these factors. No one could deny what is so manifest. But they are not enough to account for the abnormally low prices. The extent to which they affect the cost price of industries is easily calculated. Every manufacturer knows exactly how much difference is made for him by a reduction in the cost of raw material—the difference is not so great as we are asked to believe, except perhaps in the case of cotton; he knows also what saving is involved in the improvements of machinery, and when he complains of prices becoming low, he is, of course, allowing fully for these economies. On the other hand, it is to be remembered that if raw material has become cheaper, manual labour in most industries has become a good deal dearer.

If you ask a mill-owner or a weaver, for instance, to tell you the cost price of his goods and the price at which he has sold them in 1897 and this year, he will have no difficulty in convincing you that his sale price has decreased to an infinitely greater degree than his cost price. The calculation has been recently worked out

very carefully by the syndicate of the Textiles Union for "Warp 28"—the classical number for cotton; in order to place its statement outside the realms of discussion, the Union has separated the working expenses from the price of the raw material, and records that the margin left to the manufacturer on his sale price for the working expenses went down from 1 franc 56 centimes in 1865 to 60 centimes in 1903.

What has caused the present crisis for a great many industries is not small profits, but sale below cost value, forcing them year after year to make encroachments upon capital. The crisis must last until a balance has been struck between supply and demand, and this is only to be brought about by a systematic restriction of production in accordance with the needs of the different markets. Willy-nilly, we must come to this restriction sooner or later, in some shape or form, and the country that attempts it first will be well repaid.

FRANCE. IMPROVEMENTS IN MACHINERY

CHAPTER III

FRANCE. IMPROVEMENTS IN MACHINERY

I

HAVING made the circuit of the world, let us turn our attention now to France, to appreciate whose present economical status this general survey was necessary. Her relations with all the other countries make her part and parcel of the universal movement.

In common with the other nations, France has seen old-established and valuable markets closed to her, according as her customers in different regions have developed, and have established industries in rivalry with hers. Yet other markets have been snatched from her by stronger rivals—for instance, those in South America, which, in part, she has seen pass into the hands of Germany and of the United States.

Thus her economical situation might have become very serious, and have resulted in the wrecking of her chief industries, if her colonies

had not come into existence in time to supply fresh markets. The colonial policy of France was her salvation, and the country can never be too grateful to Jules Ferry for his foresight in thus saving her from commercial ruin.

It must be said, however, for the commercial classes in France, that they are by nature more prudent than those of other countries, though some of our industries have of recent years fallen into the mistake of over-production.

Let us take note of certain significant data which are at hand. It is now some years since M. Edmond Théry, that eminent economist, drew attention to the danger of over-production in a preface he contributed to M. Francis Laur's informing work upon monopolies. He pointed out very justly that, in order to form an estimate of the extent of our industries, it was quite unnecessary to make out an elaborate table of statistics, and that there was a much simpler and easier way of arriving at the facts: namely, that of ascertaining the total horse-power employed in our manufactories. This figure indicates as nearly as possible the importance and extent of our entire industrial machinery, and in consequence of our production.

Recognizing the truth of this, let us leave on one side the figures adduced by M. Théry,

which are now some years out of date, and let us apply his method to the data furnished by the latest statistics issued by our Ministry of Commerce.

The horse-power in use in French industries in 1890 amounted to 863,000; ten years later, in 1900, the figure is more than doubled, 1,791,000. Since 1890, there has been a still higher rate of increase, the figure having reached 1,994,989 in 1902. Among the industries that have developed most speedily is that of metals, which employed in 1890 only 167,584 horse-power, while in 1902 it employs 354,856. The increase shown by the textile industries is greater still, the figure having been 172,999 in 1890 and 434,529 in 1902.

To give life to these cold facts, we should have recourse to M. Théry's method, and calculate, as he does, the amount of manual labour of which all this machinery takes the place; a simple calculation, given the principle accepted by experts, that one-horse power is the equivalent of the labour of twenty-one men. Thus it is that M. Théry comes finally to the conclusion that, as regards production we are in the same position as though our working-class population had tripled, and as though every French citizen had at his service three iron slaves, the upkeep

of which does not cost more than five centimes a day.

Let us now look a little more closely into the condition of some of our great industries, taking from the Statistical Annual of the Ministry of Commerce particulars of other kinds, so as to give its full value to the argument already drawn from the horse-power figures.

II

Let us take the cotton industry, for instance; it is an easy matter to follow its development. The raw material comes entirely from abroad, and our custom-house statistics tell in exactly what quantities. The total amount in 1890 was 2,500,000 cwt., excluding what was re-exported; in 1900, the figure increased to 3,142,000 cwt. Then comes an almost incredible rise to 4,376,000 cwt. in 1903. If in 1904 the figure came down to 2,500,000, that is due entirely to the fact that the price of cotton had doubled.

Who would venture to declare that this increase was normal and in response to the demand? No doubt, the uses of cotton are being extended unceasingly—it is used in

everything nowadays, and is often turned to accounts for which it is not suited—but this has been true for some considerable time past, and is not the outcome merely of the last few years.

When we see the number of spindles increasing in five years—between 1898 and 1903—from 5,300,000 to 6,150,000; and that of looms, in the eastern district alone, from 46,000 to 54,000, it is difficult to believe that the normal consumption has increased in the same degree. The truth is, that many of those who manufactured at so feverish a rate in 1900 were not thinking of the consumption at all. All they thought of was the high prices then in vogue—prices which they quite wrongly took as heralds of a permanent revival, and of the beginning of a new era of prosperity. If they had only looked round them attentively, they would have been warned by several other symptoms that their output was more than sufficient. In a kindred industry, that of wool, there had come about a state of things from which cotton was bound to suffer.

We all know through what difficulties the woollen industry has had to pass, and how genius alone has been able to save it. Together with the silk industry, it constituted one of our

principal exports, and therefore it was affected more than others by the great movement which we have already analysed and which impelled the majority of nations to establish at home all those branches of manufactory for which they were dependent upon the foreigner. Wool could not escape from their general law any more than silk could. In succession, Germany, the United States, Austria, Russia, and Spain were to be found developing their production of wool and depriving the French industry of a great part of its market. France had just won a footing for its woollen goods in Japan, when that country also began to prepare to do without us.*

In so critical a situation, what should we have done in order to come to the assistance of one of our great national industries? Our first duty was to seek all possible means of enabling her to fight for the foreign markets, and, to this end, of diminishing her cost of production.

We did just the opposite—we were at pains to increase in every way the burdens weighing

* Japan has just constructed three great manufactories for muslin—our most important item. One of these is at Osaka, the other two are at Tokio. If we remember that the working-day in Japan is of fifteen or even seventeen hours, at an average wage of 25 centimes a day, we can form some idea of the industrial struggle we must soon encounter.

upon the industry. Our import duties are the highest known, and we keep on raising them continually.* New restrictions, new trammels, involving loss of time and of money, are being invented daily by our Ministry of Commerce. Finally, we reduced the working-day by two hours, thus giving an enormous advantage to our rivals without asking for anything in return.

While all other countries are doing whatever lies in their power to encourage and support their national industries, we seem to take a malign pleasure in fettering ours. Our idea of benefiting the working-man seems to consist of providing that he shall work as little as possible. †

In the woollen industry, numerous manufactories have been closed: nineteen at Rheims; thirty-nine at Fourmies; three at Tourcoing; others at St. Quentin.

These closings have had a quite unforeseen

* The Société de l'Industrie Lainière de Fourmies satisfied a Parliamentary commission that in France taxes upon wool are three times higher than they are in Belgium. In the same way, the Union des Industries Textiles has established the fact that the trade has to pay 12 francs in taxation in France, while in England it pays only 9.06.

† The Italian Government, wishing to develop the industry in the south of Italy, has granted new establishments immunity from all taxation for ten years, and has permitted them to import all other necessary plant free of duty.

issue, which leads us back to what we were saying about the cotton industry. Certain woollen manufactories, wishing to fight to the last against evil fortune, have been transformed into cotton manufactories rather than be abandoned altogether. In this way the production of cotton has been started at Fourmies and considerably increased at St. Quentin. It was necessary to draw attention to these facts because they show that there was no need to construct new looms.

The condition of the cotton industry in France was to become the more grave in that it has been developing extraordinarily elsewhere of recent years, and that our rivals, not satisfied with providing for their own needs, have passed from the defensive to the offensive, and have made inroads on all the markets which formerly we supplied.*

* Germany has increased her export of cotton by 30 per cent., Belgium by 20 per cent. In the United States, 270 new cotton factories have been established since 1900, and the number of spindles has gone from 15,000,000 to 21,000,000. Italy has made giant's strides within a few years. Her exports of cotton goods, which amounted in 1887 to only 620,000 kilos, increased to 12,350,000 in 1900—an increase of 1892 per cent.! She is on the way to undermining British influence in Asia Minor, as is evidenced by the growth of her imports at Aleppo.

As for the United States, they have increased their textile industries enormously between 1890 and 1900. Thus cotton

And what we have said of woollen and cotton goods can be said equally of our silk, which formerly was mistress of the whole world, but which now is having inroads made on it everywhere, in Germany, Italy, Switzerland, the United States, and which has begun to find a new and still more formidable competitor in Japan.*

If we pass now to the metal industry, we shall find that it also has passed through the same illusions and the same ordeals. It also was misled by the rise in prices and the large demands caused by the great public works and by the Paris Exhibition. It also went beyond the limit, as is evidenced by the increase in the number of blast furnaces, and now it is obliged to mark time like the rest. What saved it and enabled it to extricate itself from the crisis more

spindles have gone from 14,000,000 to 15,000,000 ; looms from 324,000 to 490,000 ; looms for wool from 67,000 to 80,000 ; those for hosiery from 36,000 to 75,000 ; spindles for silk from 718,000 to 1,426,000, and those for looms for silk from 20,000 to 48,000.

* The amount of raw material taken by the different countries enables us to realize the progress made by our competitors ; the increase in the consumption of silk, which has been 31 per cent. for the other European nations, 83 per cent. for the United States, has only been 10 per cent. for France. Since 1898, the production in the United States has been greater than with us. Their production in 1898 was 237,000 kilos ; now it is 1,850,000.

speedily than certain other industries, was the fact that it had the courage to reduce its output the moment it discovered that it had been going ahead too fast.

I have enlarged upon these points because of the great importance of the industries concerned, employing as they do a very considerable number of workmen—500,000 in metallurgy, 800,000 in textiles—and because it is these industries that have developed most, and that for several years past have been most affected by the general condition of surfeit.

There are, however, very few industries that have not been tempted into over-production of late. Every one is anxious nowadays to make his fortune, and business is generally regarded as the shortest way towards the goal. Newcomers neglect to ascertain whether there be room for them. They do not realize how things have changed. They have heard how people have succeeded in the past beyond all hope, and they have no doubt that they will have the same good fortune. The temptation is all the more strong in that there are no limitations to industrial production; herein it differs profoundly from agriculture, which is perforce kept within the bounds of the cultivable land. In business the field of activity is limitless. You

can build factories and instal looms and spindles to any degree you will.

What is even more dangerous than the temptation to build is that temptation to expand which comes to every one in business, and which seems to point in the direction of his best interests. For the more he produces, the more he reduces his general expenses, the more he lowers his net costs, the greater his advantages over his competitors: herein lurks a perpetual temptation to the manufacturer against which even the most prudent—even those most opposed in theory to over-production—are not proof. Industrial pressure, this new phenomenon that to-day is assuming proportions that begin to be disquieting, is to be attributed to no other cause than this. Every one hopes to crush his rivals by the mass of his production, and to remain a solitary victor on the stricken field.

III

Upon this theme we have now to face the views of the foes of our economical doctrine, pointing in triumph at all this over-production and exclaiming: "There is the fatal, inevitable outcome of protection. Over-production is its

natural fruit, and protectionists have no right to complain about it: they are but reaping what they have sown. The exceptional advantages created by protection for the favoured industries prove too effective a fillip, and urge them into over-production. Every one makes for the field in which most money is to be earned, and only realizes his mistake when he has gone too far. Free trade would preserve us from such dangers; no one would venture to produce before assuring himself of purchasers. The falling off of the price would suffice to warn the producer and to keep him back. It would be a check on the most ardent."

The reasoning is specious, but it is not borne out by the facts of experience. We would not deny that the protectionist system does stimulate production by encouraging industry, and that its influence in this direction is apt to be excessive. But it is to be hoped that our manufacturers will realize presently that the fierce rivalry against each other they are now waging, robs them of the benefits of protective legislation, and that a wise compact would be more to their interest than all this relentless strife.

But it would be a grave mistake to suppose that under free trade the state of things would be improved. It is obvious that a manufacturer

who is obliged to seek his purchasers all over the world, and who cannot even count upon those in his own special market, must live in a state of perpetual uncertainty, and cannot possibly know the real extent of the demand as well as he who lives under a protectionist *régime*, and who knows at least what purchasers he will find at home; the former has to produce more or less "on spec" and in the dark, whereas the latter sees clearly how he stands.

Another influence which works more strongly under free trade than under protection is the necessity of producing in large quantities, so as to diminish working expenses and keep down the net cost. It is because she has been slipping down the fatal incline for fifty years past that England has increased her output beyond all measure, and now finds herself in possession of manufactories and plant quite out of proportion to her steadily decreasing *clientèle* throughout the world.

This is so true, and she is being carried along at such a speed, that at this very moment—on the morrow of the crisis which threatened so gravely her cotton industry a year ago—she is going ahead again full tilt on her career of over-production with a blindness that is amazing. The English newspapers tell us that new mills

are being erected in Lancashire representing something like 2000 looms and 2,000,000 spindles! And that at a time when it is being noted in every corner of the globe that the production of cotton is far surpassing the demand.

IV

The truth is that over-production is at present an endemic evil, which rages alike under protection and under free trade; apart from the influences at which we have glanced, it has quite another and very powerful generator, namely, the increasing progress in the perfecting of machinery. Whether this take the form of quite new inventions or the improvement and development of old, the result is the same: the diminution of hand-labour and the reduction of the number of hands. No one can interfere with this, and we encounter here one of those primordial economic laws against which it is vain to rebel, however regrettable their results.

It furnishes us with a decisive answer to another objection, very grave at first sight, which is advanced by those who refuse absolutely to admit that there is such a phenomenon as over-production. "Your fears are vain," they say; "over-production is merely an accidental

thing that corrects itself, and this will prove the case now as always. After a certain period of slackness, during which there will be a natural abatement in production, the market will return to its healthier condition; the demand will become stronger again, new purchasers will make their appearance, and equilibrium will be re-established. All is well that ends well."

I am far from seeing things in this optimistic light, but, granting that it be so, for the sake of argument, the theory leaves out of account this factor of which I have spoken —the unceasing and unlimited perfecting of machinery.

This process of perfecting proceeds at an unheard-of pace. The United States make some new invention every day which has the effect of reducing the number of workmen required—such as the new cotton loom which requires but one workman to every eight or even twelve looms. It is true that this particular loom does not yet yield good results, except with common coarse stuffs, but who shall say that some means will not be discovered of adapting it to finer material? In this case it will involve the suppression of half the manual labour now required. The Americans have invented all kinds of wonderful machines performing tasks

so delicate and difficult that the supplest human hands cannot compete with them.*

There is no reason, therefore, why in time workmen should not be almost entirely replaced by the slave of iron alluded to by M. Théry. The results of this gradual elimination of manual labour have begun to make themselves

* M. Jules Huret, in his very suggestive and interesting book on the United States, "De New York à New Orleans," gives us a humorous account of one of these marvellous American machines which he saw in a metal foundry. "A tall turret with gigantic arms set in motion by one man, glided about over the immense room, taking up out of the furnaces as it passed great plates of steel, 50 centimetres thick, raising them aloft, turning them round, replacing them in other furnaces, or putting them on the cylinders of the rolling-mills (?), making a thousand gestures so swift and unexpected that I simply could not follow them, and pirouetting round with all the graces of a ballet-dancer! Literally, it waltzed! We rushed about after it and its inmate, but of a sudden it would threaten us with its agile and mighty arm, and we slipped to one side. This is a true description. It all seemed like a nightmare, and I kept asking myself whether I was not dreaming. I think it was of this Hoffmannesque engine that the American manager sai to me—

"'Not good enough, this. I've asked the Board for half a million dollars to construct a new one, which shall be twice as practical.'

"'And what will you do with this one—sell it?'

"He smiled.

"'Not likely. We shall "scrap" it. We are often asked to sell our machines to Europe, but we always refuse. It would be bad policy to provide our rivals with our own special arms.'"

felt already in our great industries, and it is possible to figure them out exactly.

Let us take, for instance, the English cotton industry. In 1891, it counted 45,000,000 spindles; now it counts 47,000,000, an increase of 3·6 per cent. Has the number of workmen increased in proportion? Not at all—far from increasing, it has been diminished by 3·8 per cent., going down from 605,000 in 1891, to 582,000 in 1901. In France, we should certainly be able to record the same result, if our official statistics were as well made out as the English.

Our *Annuaire de Commerce* furnishes us, however, with sufficient data regarding the metal industries. It establishes the fact that in 1901, 72,000 workmen were employed in the production of 1,000,743 tons, while in 1902 only 68,000 were employed in the production of 1,000,885—a diminution of 4,000.

The conclusion to be drawn from these facts, which are but a feeble indication of what the future has in store for us, is manifest, and has been formulated with admirable precision by the great American statistician, Edward Atkinson, whose words I may here cite textually: "The time is not far distant," he declares, "when even in the textile industry the same conditions will prevail that we find in the metal foundries

to-day : you will scarcely see a single hand in the workshop. Workmen will become fewer and fewer, the work being all done automatically, until at last the manufactories shall have become nothing but mechanical contrivances, conducted by a few experts keeping an eye on the machines, and with only a very few specially chosen skilful hands employed in the weaving rooms."

Thus, even in the collective industries individuality, personal capacity, and aptitude, will come to prevail more and more, and though the manufactories may increase in number, and their output become ever greater, the proportion of ordinary hands will steadily decrease.

MERCHANTS AND WORKMEN

CHAPTER IV

MERCHANTS AND WORKMEN

I

OUR French workmen, who have an instinctive dread of this danger, endeavour to ward it off by refusing to adapt themselves to the progress of machinery; we find them going out on strike when their employer calls on them to manage four spindles at a time as in England. Many of them draw the line at two spindles. The unfortunate fellows imagine they are doing a good thing when they oblige their employer to find occupation for as many of them as possible, not perceiving that they are thus preventing him from improving their lot and from increasing their wages. Yet the figures are there to open their eyes, and to enable them to see how things really stand: the American cotton-weaver, who attends to eight spindles, earns sixty-two francs a week; the Englishman, who attends to four, earns thirty; while the Frenchman, with two,

earns only twenty-four. Yet the French workman, who earns less than the American or the Englishman, costs his employer much more and augments his working expenses to a very considerable extent; his labour represents 12 francs to each spindle, while the Englishman's is only 7·50 and the American's 7·80.

What is the result? Simply that the French merchant is handicapped in the competition, and thus loses a proportion of his trade, to the great detriment of the workmen. It must be admitted that the truth of this is now gradually beginning to come home to the workmen themselves, and that in consequence some of them are seeing the wisdom of agreeing to work the four spindles.

There is, of course, no doubt that the inevitable result of the advances made in industrial machinery will be a reduction in the number of workmen employed, and that we find ourselves thus face to face with an economic and social problem for which some satisfactory solution must at all costs be found. How is work to be found for all the hands that will be thrown idle upon the market? It will be for economists and statesmen to inquire into this serious state of affairs, and to devise some means for facilitating the transition to a new order of things.

II

The Socialists believe that they have found the true solution; after a long and vain resistance against machinery as the enemy of the worker, they have ended by bowing down before it as something inevitable, and to-day we find them declaring that it is to be blessed for doing away with so much ungrateful and unnecessary human labour. There is no cause, it seems, to be afraid of its results. To make sure of every workman finding employment, all that is needed is to reduce the length of the working day, shortening it, according to the time-saving properties of the machine, from ten hours to eight or six or even five. After a long period of sorrow and suffering mankind will arrive in this way eventually at the millennium.

In the abstract, this reasoning is all right, and it sounds so well that one would like to believe it irrefutable. In practice, however, it conflicts with the facts. The mistake the Socialists fall into lies in their belief that the reduction of the hours of labour is a matter that each country is able to settle for itself; whereas it would only be practicable if the country making the experiment had no commercial and

industrial relations with the rest of the world, had no exports, and could live upon its own produce. This state of things exists only in dreamland.

The commercial interests of the nations, far from being isolated, are getting to be more and more intermingled and interdependent; their solidarity is becoming every day more manifest. There is not a single nation at present which is not obliged, in order to keep going and to provide work for its labourers, to export a part of its produce, and in order that it may hold its own in the general competition, its net costs must be kept down. Now, as labour represents in most industries the most important item, it is essential that there should not be too great a discrepancy as regards its cost in different countries. The question has become an international one of the highest importance, and can only be settled by the various nations in council. Only thus can all the interests involved be reconciled, and our French Socialists, who at their public meetings cry out so vehemently for an eight-hours' day, should address their appeals to workmen abroad, until they have converted the foreigner to their views; they could only achieve their ends in France at the expense of our own unfortunate workmen.

The reduction of the hours of labour, moreover, cannot go beyond a certain point, and will not suffice in itself to make up for the diminution in the need for manual labour caused by the progress of machinery. This is, moreover, another objection to any undue regulation of the hours of labour. It is apt to be forgotten that, side by side with the three million operatives in our great manufactories, there are six millions working in small establishments, or in their own homes, on whom an eight-hours' day, still less a five-hours' day, could not be imposed, for the conditions of their labour have not been affected by the advent of machinery; (in agriculture, there are another three millions who will always be obliged to rise before dawn and work until after sunset.)

Among these three millions there will assuredly be many who will find it hard to reconcile themselves to a continuance of their unremitting labour, if they hear that the operatives in the city are only asked to work a few hours a day. These will quit the plough, and offer their services, cheap, at the doors of the manufactories. Instead, therefore, of the out-of-work problem being solved, the number of our out-of-works will be greater than ever.*

* The American workers instead of fighting against the

III

Now the actual condition of things in respect to unemployment is serious enough, without our allowing it to get worse. When we turn our eyes in this direction, we are startled and shocked by what we see, for there is no more infallible evidence as to the real condition of the market than the statistics as to the number of hands out of work. When trade is prosperous, the number is reduced to a minimum. When trade is bad it increases.

It would seem as though the majority of the great markets have been slack for some years past. In the Board of Trade Report for 1903, we get precise information as to the state of things in England. "The labour market," it tells us, "shows a falling-off compared with the preceding three years. The average percentage of trades-unionists out of work has been 5·1 in 1903. It was 4·4 in 1902, 3·8 in 1901, 2·4 in 1899. The number of people in London in receipt of

machines, do all they can to bring them to perfection, knowing that the more perfect the machine, the more important is the man who attends to it, and the bigger his wage. Their industrial ideal is that of a small body of skilled artisans, highly paid and continually bettering their position by raising themselves steadily on the ladder of professional knowledge.

poor-law relief increased from 103,000 in 1900 to 114,000 in 1903.

In Germany the situation is not much more brilliant, despite the apparent prosperity of her trade. M. Vaillant, in his recent speech in the Chamber of Deputies, cites an elaborate census taken by the Berlin Workmen's Syndicate, according to which the total number of men entirely out of work in the Prussian capital was 76,000. Including those partially out of work the number was 117,000.

Let us come now to France, and consult the tables of statistics supplied by the Labour Bureau, and complemented by M. Faguet's report to the Labour Council.

These documents tell us that the average number of out-of-works was 7 per cent. in 1896, 7·75 per cent. in 1901, and 9 per cent. in 1902. But it must be noted that this is not the whole truth. These numbers are supplied by the better-organized syndicates which suffer least from the evil of unemployment.

More importance is to be attached to another document, infinitely more precise, and at the same time more wide-embracing. In the census returns of 1896 and 1901, workers out of employment were called upon to mention their trade. From these returns it appears that in

1896 the number of unemployed was 4·6 per cent., and that in 1901 it had risen to 6·5 per cent.—a very serious increase.

But these figures do not give any adequate idea of the importance of the army of unemployed, for alongside the worker who is constantly in this condition, and who comes officially under the category, must be ranged all those innumerable nondescripts, tramps and loafers, who live by odd jobs when they do any work at all. These men adrift, objects of so much danger to society, are reckoned at 400,000 in France. They are a scourge to our country districts, and complaints about them come unceasingly to the Government as well to the local authorities.

The numbers of our unemployed would be much greater were it not for the immense development of the new motor industry, still so conspicuously French. The progress in this has been one of the most curious economic phenomena of recent years. The total production for 1903, in France, is estimated at 171 million francs, of which about 50 millions were exported. If to this we add the output of bicycles and motorcycles, which represent about 240 millions, we get a grand total of 400 millions. The number of workmen engaged directly or indirectly in

that great industry is reckoned at 150,000, and their wages at 300,000,000 francs. Imagine what would be the state of things if this great army of workers was unemployed!

It is only right to bracket with the motor industry all those electricity works whose advance is also one of the most considerable factors in our economic situation. But flourishing though these industries be now, it would be a great mistake to believe that they are going to maintain for long their upward tendency. The *clientèle* for automobiles has been supplied for some years to come, and it is evident that the "boom" still in progress will shortly come to an end.

IV

If we pass now from industry to commerce, we have to note a still more swollen condition of things. The exodus from the country which was caused by the agricultural crisis, and which we shall analyse in detail presently, has affected commerce even more than it has industry. Multitudes of small farmers, and even of small land-owners, have flooded into the cities, and having capitalized their small possessions have invested the result in a small confectionery

business, or haberdashery establishment, or fruit-shop, or more frequently still in a wine-shop. The great increase in the numbers of cabarets—a thing to be so much regretted—is due in large degree to this.*

To form a clear idea of the really alarming increase in the numbers of these small tradesmen, the figures should be compared with those that show the corresponding diminution of the agricultural population during the same period. The *Political Economy Annual* for 1899 helps us to do this. It tells us that while in 1872 the agricultural classes represented 5270 in every section of 10,000 of the entire population, in 1884 the proportion was only 5003, and in 1891 only 4733. While as regards commerce, the movement was all the other way: the proportion in

* This side of the question of the rural exodus has been clearly dealt with by M. Tisserand, Director of Agriculture, in his masterly introduction to the decennial statistical record of 1882. In this he raises a cry of warning against the growth in the numbers of middlemen as one of the dangers of the future. "They have multiplied," he tells us, "from 1,537,000 in 1861, to 4,644,000 in 1881; this, in spite of the loss of Alsace-Lorraine; an increase of more than six to the square kilometre! In other words, our agriculturists and industrials have to keep and even to enrich 3,106,000 more middlemen now than then! This is a real evil, explaining at once the diminution in the profits of agriculture and industry, and the increase in prices to the consumer."

1872 having been 843 per 10,000; in 1881, 1063; and in 1891, 1076.*

We are not yet in possession of the complete results of the census of 1901. However, we are enabled to form an idea of them from the luminous preliminary report of M. Levasseur, Director of the Collège de France, which has appeared recently. He informs us that from 1896 to 1901, the numbers of the urban population have been increased by 895,000, this figure resulting not from the excess of births over deaths—which comes to only 35,000—but being accounted for principally by the enormous exodus from the rural districts, which is recorded as exceeding the figures of the preceding census by 670,000.

Possibly this figure may need to be corrected, for if we turn to another section of the report, it would appear that the rural exodus towards certain large towns has ceased entirely in some very important regions, such as those of the north and east. This is a very notable improvement, and a reassuring sign for the future. The evil is already checked, and we are beginning to ascend again the incline down which we have been gliding.

Unfortunately, the commercial plethora still

* It should be borne in mind, however, that both tendencies became noticeable long before 1872.

rages to its full extent, and its results are deplorable for every one, for consumers as well as for agriculturists.

This multiplicity of petty traders in all our towns, big and little, obliged to make their livelihood by the sale of the products passing through their hands, has had the effect of raising in an extraordinary degree all the absolute necessaries of life. We thus arrive at this absurd state of things, that the more the producer strives to lower his cost of production and his sale price, the more the consumer has to pay. It is the intermediary—the petty tradesman—who gets the greater part of the profit.

What is most annoying about it is that the tradesman himself, far from making his fortune, merely stands still feebly, when he does not come to smash. This fact may sound incredible, yet it is easily explained; the large profits realized formerly by the middlemen, when they were limited in numbers, having led to the exodus from the rural districts, the result has been that a fierce and ruinous competition has come about, between the great numbers that are now dabbling in trade to-day.

We could instance districts in Paris in which twenty years ago there were only two fruiterers, and in which now there are six or eight—the

same could be said of grocers, bakers, butchers, haberdashers, florists; while as to wine-sellers, their name is legion. All these small shops, groaning under heavy expenses and forced to make their profits out of a meagre *clientèle*, are only just managing to exist in spite of the high prices they ask.

And, of course, they are in continual warfare with the big stores which are coming into existence everywhere, winning customers to them by their low prices. The tendency is irresistible, however much we may regret it.

The only way of fighting against it would be for the small tradesmen to have recourse to co-operation themselves, so as to get their goods at the same low prices as the stores. Unfortunately they are too much divided among themselves for that, and co-operation is so little in our blood that we prefer to perish rather than come to terms with our competitors.

Meanwhile, certain it is that our petty tradesmen suffer cruelly, and that some of them fall out of the ranks every day. The statistics as to failures tell us that.

THE RETURN TO THE LAND

CHAPTER V

THE RETURN TO THE LAND

I

WHAT, then, is to become of our countless workers unable to find work?

There is but one opening, one resource for them—an opening wide enough for all, a resource that will be inexhaustible for centuries yet to come: the land.

For a moment the land has been thrown into the shade by the manufacturing industries which have fascinated all eyes, absorbed all minds, given rise to all kinds of hopes. The humble industry of agriculture fell into disdain.

It only began once more to raise its head when science at last turned her eyes upon it, and became aware that it was indeed the first of all industries, not only because it was the most necessary, but because it was the most elevated scientifically, being in its essence the centre of all those sciences that find in the soil their principal field of action.

But if agriculture has been reinstated in its place from the standpoint of science, this has yet to be done for it in the domain of economics; it is suffering still from its former attitude of humility, and there is much to be done before it can attain the popularity of its younger sister, industry. We shall be well employed, therefore, in doing all that we can to enlist public interest in its present condition and future possibilities. The necessity for finding new openings for labour increases every day. The more difficult the labour question becomes in the world of manufacture, the more the movement back to the land will gather force. It has begun already, and things will advance more speedily than is supposed.

II

We are met, of course, with the eternal objection which, since the beginning of the agricultural crisis, has always been thrown at those who have sought to stem the current and prevent the exodus from the fields. "You are attempting the impossible," they cry; "the movement you are trying to foster, however desirable in itself, must meet with insuperable

difficulties. The return to the land is a mere idyll, quite out of place in a matter-of-fact world like ours. How are you to divert a current which has been running with such strength for more than half a century, and which has carried along everything in its course? Our agricultural population has been decreasing steadily in accordance with the Fates.

"If the country has been abandoned, this has not been without reasons, and the reasons still exist. The agricultural labourer has deserted the soil because it imposed on him too much work and too many privations; he has preferred the factory because it gave him higher wages with less tiring work and more regular hours. Why should he return to the land which cannot offer him an equivalent for what he now has?

"The farmer and the landowner see things in the same light. If they also find their way to the towns, it is because they have found life in the country too wearing and too unprofitable."

We should not dream of denying this melancholy but manifest truth. It is incontestable that the complaints of the agricultural world are only too well founded. It is easy to understand why the rural classes have been induced to move *en masse* into the towns.

The crisis, which raged more disastrously

with us than anywhere else, because it was preceded by an era of unexampled prosperity, was bound to put our agriculturists into a state of panic and to upset all existing conditions. What industry is there which, seeing its revenues decreased by one-half, while its expenses remained stationary, could long resist such a depression? None could have borne so hard an ordeal, and but for the tenacity and courage of our agriculturists and their indestructible love for the land, there would have been an end altogether to agricultural industry in France.

The rural exodus brought it within an inch of destruction; fortunately those who remained in the breach gave proof of an indomitable energy which saved the situation.

And now, *is* it possible to stem the current? Is there any new element in the situation at present that will allow us to hope for a reaction? Undoubtedly there is. The present condition of things economically is just the opposite to what it was thirty years ago. The manufacturing industry was then in the ascendant, agriculture was going down. Now agriculture is rising visibly, while the manufacturing industry has come to a standstill.

The force of circumstances will, moreover,

bring back to agriculture those who can no longer earn a livelihood in the factories. Labourers who have been long out of work and who have families to support will give up the unequal struggle in the towns. For the few who will drag on to the end, how many will give in and reconcile themselves to the inevitable?

III

But since then a great event has come about in the history of economics, doing away with the chief cause of the crisis and completely changing the face of the agricultural world. The Government has at last hearkened to the legitimate complaints of agriculture, crushed under the weight of foreign competition, and has put it on an equality with commerce by means of a protective tariff. The tariff of 1892 was an act of reparation and justice for it.

The state of our agriculture in all its branches has been improved so much by this tariff, and our production of cereals as well as of cattle has been so much stimulated, that France has been able, not merely to supply her own needs, but to export a surplus as well.*

* Since 1884, the year preceding the first establishment of protective duties, our agricultural trade has never ceased to

So far so good, but it would not do to insist too much upon the point, and it is not to be maintained that a protectionist tariff is all that is required, and that agriculture has no other enemy besides foreign competition. On the contrary, agriculture has to cope with the same difficulties as other industries, and its life is a constant struggle. It is a great thing, however, to have removed from its path an obstacle against which all its efforts came to grief, and to have thus made it mistress of its own destinies.

Let us now inquire into the numerous disadvantages it has to fight against, premising that

improve steadily. This has been very clearly set forth in a work published by M. Henry Sagnier, of the *Journal de l'Agriculture*. In his table of statistics, M. Sagnier leaves aside such entirely foreign products as rice, coffee, tea, cocoa, and pepper, as well as our trade with Algiers and our sugar trade, which last he considers to have been too directly influenced by the special legislation of the last few years. These items eliminated, he shows that our imports of agricultural products amounted in 1884 to 1,094,000,000 francs, and our exports to 652,000,000. Thus there was an excess of imports of 441,000,000—that is to say, France had to pay out this sum to the foreigner for her food. From the beginning of 1900, the exports began to exceed the imports. The excess of imports that year was 100,000,000, in 1901 it was 152,000,000, in 1902 it reached 202,000,000. In 1903 it sank to 62,000,000, but in 1904 it rose again to 124,000,000.

In the twenty years, therefore, from 1884 to 1904, there has been an advance of 565,000,000 in this figure representing the progress made by our agriculture.

the general situation has undoubtedly improved a good deal of recent years, and is improving more and more every day.

It is to be noted, first of all, that if the agricultural crisis proved disastrous to the old-established proprietors, who saw their land depreciated to half its previous value, it affected very much less the new proprietors, who purchased their land at low prices. When land is cheap, its cultivator may hope for larger profits for his labour. Land is consequently becoming more in request, and recent statistics show in some *départements* a certain increase in rents and in the price of estates—a sure sign of revival.

Despite this slight improvement, however, there is no doubt that the position of an owner who is forced to let his land is still far from enviable, and that investments in real estate are by no means profitable. Very different is the position of the actual cultivator of the soil, whether he be landowner or farmer. It may be taken as beyond doubt that the agriculturist who has received a serious professional training, and who is at once progressive and methodical, is certain to draw in a good revenue upon his capital, whilst living in better style than many well-to-do citizens.

There is still one great difficulty in the way

of good and profitable cultivation of the soil, it is true, and that is the lack of cheap manual labour; the small farmer has to do without it, relying on his own exertions and those of his family. There is a good deal of truth in the saying, that the fortune of a small farmer is in proportion to the number of his children. The more children he has the better. This need is of good augury for the future of France, hitherto so gravely menaced by her low birth-rate.

The agricultural crisis, of course, has been by no means the only cause of the exodus from the country. There is another which has been more decisive in its effects, namely, the change that has come over the minds of our rural population, especially of the young. They have quitted the land not because of its failure to provide them with the means of subsistence, but because of the dreariness of existence in the country and the apparent fascinations and charms of the towns.

They have been drawn to the towns like moths to the flame; in their small cottages they have sat dreaming of the splendid theatres, the brightly-lit *cafés*, the brilliant *fêtes*, all the comforts and luxuries of city life, and then, when they have come back to reality and looked round their humble dwellings, at the grey naked

walls, at the smoking candle and their soiled working clothes, they have been seized with a great longing and have had room in their minds for but one idea—to get away at all cost, blindfold, not knowing whither.

Call it what you will, this moral phenomenon is not to be ignored. This state of mind it is that is luring away our country-folk, and that accounts for the growth of our monstrous cities, stretching out their arms in all directions and absorbing the life of the regions all around.

The fascination has doubled in its intensity since enforced military service has made all the youth of the country pass through the garrisons of the towns. It is there they acquire their new tastes, habits which they can never again renounce, and in which they can indulge in the towns—so in the towns they remain. If by chance they do return to the plough, it is not for long; they soon weary of the monotonous life of the fields, they find everything beneath them, men and things, and they seize the first opportunity of getting away again. Their great ambition is to become functionaries, postmen, shop-walkers, or railway *employés*.

And it is not only the men who are thus affected; the women have not escaped the contagion of their example. They also have

been fascinated by the sight of the towns to which they have formed the habit of going in search of pleasure and distractions. They have derived from them a taste for gaiety and fine dresses and holiday-making. On their return, their village seems to them dull, the farm dirty and dismal, and their work repugnant; the labourers seem to them dull and loutish compared with the seductive youths who have lavished money on them in the towns. The *rôle* of farmer's wife seems to them despicable, and they will have nothing to do with any of the young men of the village except those who have become clerks or functionaries

This picture suggests something of the change that has come over the life of most of our villages during the last twenty years. We could instance several cases of great agricultural families which have given up splendid properties with aching hearts, because their sons could not find women to marry them and share their life in the country.

IV

Let us consider now, what methods are to be adopted to further the movement back to the land, and to attract those who still hesitate, but who would be only too happy to turn their

steps in this direction if they could be shown that it would mean happiness and prosperity and well-being.

First of all, let us see what it is that brings success to the manufacturing industry, under what conditions a factory may be counted upon earning good profits.

Statesmen, economists, business men alike are all agreed that for an industry to attain its maximum of prosperity it must produce inexpensively and in large quantities. Its working and incidental expenses must be kept as low as possible. An important item of the working expenses is the raw material. When this is purchased upon advantageous terms and when the works are well equipped in every way, the business may be expected to achieve good results.

It is just the same with agriculture. In this case the seeds are the raw material; the fertilizers represent the potent machinery. In both respects agriculture during the last ten years has been at least on a level with, if it has not had the advantages of, manufacture.

Through the systematic and energetic efforts of the agricultural syndicate, both seeds and fertilizers of the best quality are now to be obtained at half the former prices. The change

thus brought about is perhaps the most remarkable of any during the last half century in the world of agriculture; it has increased tenfold the possibilities of agricultural development.

Farming on a small scale, always a prey to hesitation and timorousness, has not yet entered fully into the current, and there is still much progress to be made here. It has begun to move, however. The "model farms" which have been becoming so numerous have served to open men's eyes, and to show them what can be done.

The small farmer is no longer able to plead his poverty as an excuse for not making use of the new methods, because he has only to put out his hand to get possession of the small amount of money required for the necessary purchases. It will be advanced to him by the admirable network of 1500 mutual loan banks, local or provincial, which are now to be found in every part of France. From these he can get capital not merely for fertilizers but also for investments in live stock, which is a greater consideration still. These advances are made at 3 or 4 per cent. interest at most.

Our organization in respect to agricultural loans is one of the most perfect and most complete in the world. Since the authorities

placed at the disposal of these regional banks, without charging them interest, 40,000,000 francs from the Banque de France, agriculture has been unable to complain that it has been kept back by want of capital. It has had no reason to be jealous of manufacture, and has been able to raise money at even lower rates.

It is a matter for regret that it has not availed itself to the full of its opportunities, for some proportion of the capital available for its use is still idle. That seems a surprising phenomenon, but it will surprise no one familiar with the distrustful and over-prudent mind of the French peasant.

He dislikes borrowing, and will borrow only when he feels quite certain he can repay. He is not like those *chevaliers d'industrie* who abound in cities and who seek loans from every one, regardless of risks of failure. Our agriculturists are of a very different stamp, and in consequence our agricultural banking system is the most firmly established in the world.

This is the reason why there was not an immediate rush upon the well-filled coffers of the regional banks. Our agriculturists have still to grasp fully the importance of the institution of credit as an instrument of economic progress, required by rich as well as poor.

Their education in this direction is making progress, and small farmers who at first fought shy of the banks, now may be seen making their way to them quite openly and no longer shamefaced over the transaction.

V

But if agriculture is better placed than manufacture in this respect, it is less fortunate in regard to general expenses. Here a most important item is taxation. It makes all the difference as between the cost of an article in one country and in another.

This is a matter of the utmost importance to agriculture, and cannot be insisted upon too much; it is the key really to the agricultural problem of to-day. The return to the land will not be fully accomplished until the powers that be shall have decided to enter courageously upon the path of reform in the matter of agricultural taxation. Our code of procedure requires to be almost completely reformed, and our civil code also will have to be subjected to drastic alterations if it is to be made really efficacious. The axe must strike deep into this giant tree which has been growing for a century and stifling everything that lies within its shade.

The heavy charges that are such a weight upon landed property have often been condemned. Agriculture is taxed more heavily than any other industry—it is the beast of burden of the Treasury, as some one has called it. It is not easy to calculate exactly how much it has to bear, so multifarious are the various rates and taxes by which it is affected. This task has, however, been undertaken from different sides with great precision. In particular, the calculation which was made some time ago by M. de Luçay has of late been proceeded with by M. Fouquet in a communication made by him to the National Society of Agriculture, published in the *Journal d'Agriculture* for August 20 and 27, 1904. M. Fouquet begins by showing the amount of direct taxation levied upon the agriculturist; the land tax, the door and window taxes, the various charges and duties upon personal property, the stamp duties upon deeds, the tax upon *mainmorte* goods, etc.; the total for the whole of France amounts to 411,000,000 francs.

The 411 millions are borne by a revenue which M. Fouquet estimates as 2,397,000,000; but this revenue is already enormously weighted with charges that reduce its figure very considerably. The French mortgage debt, which

in 1894 amounted to 14,000,000,000 francs, places on the land an annual charge of at least 476,000,000 francs, which reduces this revenue to 1,921,000,000. The 411 millions of direct taxation upon this figure represents no less a proportion than 21 per cent.

But the direct taxation is not all. There must be added all the innumerable transmission duties, fees in connection with sales and lettings, succession duties—all of which amount to 700 millions more. M. Fouquet distributes this amount equally over agricultural property, town property, and personal estate—a method of calculation manifestly to the disadvantage of the land, as the *droits de mutation* which it bears are infinitely higher than those on personal estate. This only strengthens the case, however, when we find that the land's share amounts to 296 millions, which brings the total taxation up to 36 per cent.; this huge proportion being known to be below the real mark.

M. Klotz, who had the drawing up of the agricultural budget of 1905, makes the case out worse than M. Fouquet. He begins by establishing the fact that the Frenchman is more heavily taxed than any one else in the world: he pays 83 francs per head, 15 francs more, that is, than the most heavily taxed foreigner. The

French agriculturist pays on an average 138 francs.

He then proceeds to analyse the charges of all kinds that fall upon the land. To begin with, he demonstrates that, partly to the State, partly to the *département* and commune, it pays 21·80 francs per cent. of its revenue; he proceeds, however, like M. Fouquet, to deal with the mortgage debts, which he reckons at 15,000,000,000 francs, involving 600,000,000 as interest, 400,000,000 of which falls upon land not built upon, equivalent to another 20 per cent. on the agricultural revenue.

M. Klotz, having added another 1 per cent. for the expense of records required by the public officials, comes to the conclusion that, taken all together, the charges which the land must meet before producing a penny of profit represents 41 per cent. on the revenue.

In the second part of his study, M. Klotz, in order to bring out still more completely the real situation of agriculture, adds to these particulars of the charges on the land a record of the charges upon the personal estate. He finds that, according to statistics published by the Registration Department for 1903, personal estate paid 265,000,000 for transmission duties, stamp duties, revenue taxes, taxes upon stock exchange

operation, succession duties—which upon a revenue of 3,436,000,000 comes to 7·59 francs in the 100. Therefore the land is taxed relatively more than five times as much as personal estate. It is not surprising, therefore, if capital be deflected from agriculture into personal estate securities, and that landed property in France has decreased 20 per cent. in value, while personal estate has increased 50 per cent.

Of all the burdens upon agriculture, the most unjustifiable economically, and the most crushing, though not actually the heaviest, is the transmission tax with its train of formalities of all kinds; this is the principal cause of discouragement to landowners, and especially to male landowners. It is on this side that the first fiscal reforms should be undertaken in order to rid agriculture of the bonds by which it is being strangled, and to give it the freedom now enjoyed by personal estate.

We should not go so far as to advocate the placing of land upon actually the same basis as personal estate. That would be accompanied by drawbacks, and would lead to undesirable speculations. We do think, however, that it could be set free from its present shackles and made more easily transferable. Certain governments have already moved in

this direction, and it would be easy to proceed further.

In the mean time would it not be possible to benefit the land by extending to it the simplified procedure in regard to *purge* and *réalisation du gage*, which is the special privilege of the Crédit Foncier? And could not the *droit de mutation* be at once altered and diminished? Is it not regrettable that this tax, which throughout the rest of Europe varies from 1 to 3 per cent., should reach in France 6·88 per cent., and with the stamp duty 10 per cent.? What is there to prevent the *droit de mutation* from being transformed into a single *taxe d'abonnement*, as has been done in the case of *mainmorte* property and in that of personal estate?

This simple transformation would mean a great step forward. The payment of a small annual tax would be infinitely less onerous than the immediate disbursement of a large sum representing several years' income; if spread over a great number of years this tax would fall in due proportion upon all the holders of the property, and this would greatly facilitate its liquidation. The purchaser not being forced to pay down a very large amount of money on the day he enters into possession,

the passing of the land from one hand into another becomes much easier.

Unfortunately, our legislators do not at present seem disposed to adopt these measures. On the contrary, the bills now being brought forward tend rather to augment the burden land has already to bear. It would be easy to demonstrate, for instance, that the *impôt global* upon income, if established, would fall with all its weight upon real estate, which alone cannot elude the eyes of the Treasury; it will be another premium upon personal estate, which is so easily disguised; the rural exodus, instead of slackening, will gather strength.

If the intention were to disgust and dishearten our agriculturists, no more ingenious method could be devised. They are sought out in the midst of their work, already so full of anxieties, and cross-examined in detail as to everything they are doing, what they are growing, how much they are earning, and even what they eat. Their sensibilities are hurt in every way.

Every one is aware how difficult it is to get regular accounts out of farmers, even the most intelligent of them. This is not because of laziness or stupidity on their part, it is the

outcome of distrust pure and simple—to unwillingness to confide to any one the secret of their affairs. It is his nature to work from hand to mouth, each day for itself, and he is disinclined to calculate his expenses and profits in advance. Experience, perhaps, has taught that his expectations are too often all upset by the caprices of the weather, and he feels, therefore, that figuring out things ahead is waste of time. He prefers his woollen stocking to the ledger. When it is full, he has had a good year; when empty, a bad one. That is all he knows, and that is enough.

This is the man we are to call upon every year to furnish a debtor and creditor account of his exact income, such as we require from a merchant or a manufacturer. This account in itself is very difficult to make out. Agricultural operations are not those of a manufactory or of merchandise, which are concluded almost always by certain specified dates; they may extend over long, indefinite periods. The yearly budgets cannot be regularly closed because the good and bad years overlap and intermingle and cannot be divided up. The real income of a farmer at the end of any single year is almost impossible to calculate. To try to reckon it up is to take for granted

that certain operations will work out in a certain way, whereas the results may be quite different.

The Treasury will find it a very difficult matter to cope with our farmers over these accounts. We pity the Government charged with such a duty.

It is true that the supporters of this task have no fears. They hope that our country-folk, always pliable and obedient, will not have the courage to resist our all-powerful tax-collectors, and will bow their heads to the inevitable.

Possibly it will be so, but in that case our victims will be all the more exasperated, and we are much afraid that their ill-humour will be turned not only against the gentry who have played them this turn, but also against the soil itself, the source of so many troubles and worries, and that they will abandon it in their eagerness to get out of the clutches of the Treasury.

If we want to form an idea of the mental attitude of these countryfolk towards State officials, we have only to glance at what is happening now in the case of the distillers of our *vin du pays*. Nothing could be more suggestive and significant. The law had but

to authorize an administrative visit to their vaults to put them into a veritable state of insurrection; and it is noteworthy that it is not the smugglers who have been getting most excited and indignant, it is the law-abiding ones. Their anger has reached such a point that a large number of them have given up distilling and allowed their fruit to rot rather than have anything to say to the Régie.

However, the inventors of this income-tax, while aware of this danger, hope to avert it by sparing the bulk of small taxpayers—exempting in the small communes all the farmers whose income is less than 750 francs, and levying only a very light tax upon all the lower grades of taxpayers. They hope thus to get their support in the struggle against the minority who are being mulcted.

The hope is vain. The majority will soon have its eyes opened, and will perceive what to expect themselves. They will realize that, once it is put into action, the law will end by including every one; when a financial snare of this kind is set, every one gets caught in it. When the Treasury discovers that the tax is not bringing in enough money, because the larger landowners are dividing up their estates to

evade it (as is inevitable), it will have to fall back upon the lower categories and ask more from them. It will have to give its screw another twist.

This income-tax must inevitably have the effect of increasing the depreciation of landed property. Who will care to invest his money in land with this sword of Damocles hanging over his head? Every one will want to sell and no one will want to buy. Personal estate and foreign securities alone will benefit.

VI

The weakest point in connection with our agricultural system, putting it at a great disadvantage compared with our manufacturers, is the backwardness of its methods of sale; efficient selling is essential to any industry that is to be prosperous; its profits depend on this. Now most of our farmers continue to sell in the primitive old fashion, without ever asking themselves whether this could not be improved upon, and without ever realizing its ruinous effects. Some of them take their goods to the nearest market and, after much loss of time, find they must sell their stuff at any price, no matter how low,

so as not to have to take it home again; others hand over their harvest to middlemen, who speculate in it, and get all the profit to be had out of the transaction. The total loss which results to them from their lack of organization can be easily enough calculated. We have but to compare the price paid by the consumer for the chief agricultural products with the price secured by the farmer, and multiply the difference by the total amount sold. The result is simply stupefying.

Let us take the case of butcher's meat, for instance. We all know what enormous profits are made by the butchers in the big cities, though it is difficult to estimate them exactly on account of the number of factors known only to the butcher himself that can come into the sum. These profits are only to be learnt by becoming one's own butcher, which is practicable only for big concerns.

One of the first experiments of the kind was made in 1892 by the Havre Almshouses. A careful analysis of it may be found in M. Félix Alcan's book "Les Questions Agricoles." He finds from his examination of the detailed and perfectly kept accounts, that for animals of very good quality the cost price was as follows:—

For beef	...	...	1·44	francs	the kilo.
„ veal	...	...	1·66	„	„
„ mutton	...	...	1·87	„	„
„ pork	...	...	1·53	„	„

The average price comes out, therefore, at 1·40 francs.

M. Zolla proceeds to note the price of the tongues, livers, etc., and finds that it brings the average up to 1·47.

The next step was to find out the prices charged by the Havre butchers. To put his comparison beyond dispute, M. Zolla decided to take their lowest prices, and chose those which were obtained by contract by the Havre Lycée. The price for meat of all kinds was 1·60 francs per kilo, that is, 19 centimes higher than at the Almshouse. Supposing the difference had been only ten centimes, the Almshouse, which consumed 134,000 kilograms in the year, would have made an economy of 13,000 francs. This is an indication of the additional profits agriculture ought to be enjoying.

M. Zolla adds that the butcher who supplied the Lycée made a profit of at least 15 centimes per kilo.

The price of bread is more regular than that of meat, and bakers certainly do not make such large profits as butchers. The difference

between the price of bread and the price of corn varies in a remarkable degree. The statistics published by the Ministry of Agriculture show that the difference is at its greatest when corn is cheapest.

In regard to vegetables, the difference is more striking still. There is not a housekeeper who does not groan when she compares her accounts of to-day with those of yesterday.

The cause of the evil is well known—it is the great number of middlemen between the agriculturist and the purchaser. Every one of them has to make his profit out of the merchandise, which goes up in price according to the number of hands it passes through. The farmer is powerless in the hands of the middleman. He has not time to look about for purchasers himself, and he cannot hold back his goods, either because they would thus lose in value or go bad altogether, or else because he is in actual need of money and must accept whatever the middleman offers him.

We should not think of contending that all these middlemen are useless and should be done away with. On the contrary, we would not have the farmer devote himself to the selling of his goods, which takes up too much time and energy and interferes with his work. We

would have him leave this task to others. All we contend is that there are too many middlemen—four or five where there should only be one; and that these middlemen are too independent of the farmer, and work too entirely for their own hands.

If these points be conceded, the moral to be drawn is clear enough, and the remedy to the present state of things is easily found.

VII

It is to be found in co-operation. Co-operative societies will prove themselves in time the great means of emancipating agriculture; they will make it possible to get the maximum of profit out of its products by bringing buyers and sellers into touch and eliminating the parasitic middleman.

These co-operative societies can take any shape or form; their development has been so great during the last few years, and they are now so many and various, that it is not easy to pick out any one example.*

* There are 18,000 rural associations already in existence, not counting the *Sociétés d'Agriculture* and the "Committees." Of these 1500 are co-operative fruiterers or cheese-vendors, 400 co-operative bakeries, 150 co-operative dairies.

The agricultural world has gone into the co-operative movement thoroughly, perhaps more so than any other industry. It will not stop short, and it will achieve its purpose, which is the bringing of order and harmony into the working of economic laws. The public authorities understand this now, and do all they can to foster the movement. Unfortunately, the associations for selling are still the fewest.

The wine producers of the Midi were the first to take this new road, establishing in Paris and the other large towns depôts of which the only expense is that of an office under the charge of an agent to take orders. The expenses of advertisement are reduced to the sending out of cards and notices. In addition they have instituted depôts with wine-shops attached. These involve considerable outlay, but even the cost of one of these, divided among all the members of the association represented by it, is trifling compared with the enhanced profits secured by the selling of the wine direct and at the prices fixed by themselves.

The example of these wine-growers was soon followed, and every branch of agriculture is now beginning to manage in this way for itself without the interposition of the middleman.*

* The method of procedure adopted in the establishment of

We shall not attempt to enumerate the co-operative associations already formed in France

these associations is very clearly set forth by M. Kergall in an article in *La Démocratie Rurale*:—

"Landowners living in the same neighbourhood, growing the same produce, and overcoming the old feelings of jealousy and distrust which have done so much harm to our agriculture, have grouped themselves into associations numbering 10, 15, 20, up to 60 or 80 members, for the purpose of despatching their joint merchandise *en bloc* during the season to a trustworthy firm of commission agents, whose business it is to dispose of it to the best advantage.

"They have realized that in this way they economize in all the expenses involved.

"1. They benefit by the reduced tariffs accorded to goods amounting in weight to 50 or 60 kilograms, smaller consignments paying the tax in full.

"2. They do not suffer from the custom of the railways in reckoning parcels which weigh only 22 or 25 kilograms at the round figure of 30.

"3. They are able to save also in the cartage expenses.

"4. They avoid the stamp duties and registering fees upon each separate parcel.

"5. They economize in the matter of the transmission of bills, consignments, etc., by having them all dealt with together.

"To secure this result they despatch one way-bill with the whole consignment, specifying the various packages, each of which has attached to it a ticket with the sender's name, or else merely his number—each member of the group having his distinguishing number. At the same time they send the agent by post a memorandum, giving the name or number of each member, with particulars as to the nature and weight of his package, so that a separate bill of sale may be made out for each. As a precautionary measure, a duplicate of it is sent in one of the packages, recognizable, lest this should go astray or be delayed in the post, by a known mark."

during the last twenty years, but there are a few to which it may be worth our while to devote our attention. The most important are those for the production and sale of butter, of eggs and cheese, and of vegetables and fruit.

The co-operative butter-factories offer advantages to the producer that cannot fail to be recognized. A farmer making his own butter gets 3 kilograms out of 100 litres of milk—33 litres to the kilo. Now, the co-operative establishments, thanks to their perfected utensils, get a kilo out of 26 or 28 litres. And that is not all. In addition to the economy in the raw material, there is also an economy of time which is not to be despised; it is only natural that much less time should be required to deal with 1000 litres of milk in a single establishment than in eighty or one hundred different ones.

Needless to add that as the butter is made every day from fresh cream, instead of two or three times a week from cream that is turning sour and with imperfect utensils, the co-operative butter is always superior and of prime quality.

And it is not merely in the production of the butter that these co-operative associations benefit the farmer, but also in the selling of it.

They find him purchasers both at home and on distant markets abroad.*

The Charente and Poitou district contains ninety-eight of these establishments, representing nearly 50,000 farmers with a total of about 130,000 cows. The average production of this important group comes to 200,000,000 litres of milk, equivalent to 10,000,000 kilos of butter, worth from 27 to 30 million francs; it is from this group that Paris receives half its immense supply.

The production of cheese upon this co-operative basis presents the same advantages. The French associations for producing cheese that came first into existence are in the Jura and Franche-Comté, where they practically have the monopoly of Gruyère. These cheese-manufacturing establishments offer more or less the same rate of profit as those for butter. Milk that brings in the individual farmer from 6 to 8 centimes, produces from 11 to 12 when

* It appears from an inquiry made by the Minister for Agriculture in 1902, that there are in France 2000 establishments producing fresh butter for sale; 661 of these are organized on a co-operative basis, 1339 belonging to individuals. Their total production is estimated at 62,000,000 francs. As the annual production of butter for the whole of France is estimated at 300,000,000 francs, it is evident that there is still a wide field for enterprise.

in the hands of these *fruitières*, as they are designated.

But the development of the *fruitières* is far behind that of the butter-factories; their number remains stationary somewhere about 2500, and they have not extended much beyond the *départements* in which they originated. This is attributed to lack of enough capital to enable them to pay cash down to the farmers, who are obliged to wait for their money until the *fruitières* have effected their sales. This places them at a disadvantage compared with the private cheese-producers, who pay at least once a month for the milk they use.

Among the great co-operative associations which, by undertaking the sale of produce, have entirely done away with the greedy middleman, may be mentioned that of the gardeners of Nantes, which operates so largely upon the English market. The syndicate of the gardeners of Hyères despatches large consignments of vegetables and flowers to Paris and all the large towns. That of Lauris disposes of asparagus, that of Quincy-Ségy deals with plums and black currants. That of Mentone sells lemons at the rate of more than two millions a year; thanks to it, the best lemons, which used to sell at 6 francs per 1000, now fetch 11 francs.

The co-operative societies of the agriculturists of the Puy-de-Dome, and those of Lot-et-Garonne, of the Alpes and of Provence, which extend over seven departments and comprise 188 syndicates, and the society of the "*Syndicats du Sud-Est*," should also be mentioned.

The syndicate of the growers of early vegetables, founded in 1901, has established a co-operative association for the purpose of sharing the use of a stall in the Halles. Its representative is to be seen at pavillon No. 6, ready to accept all orders for consignment abroad. That is a new and ingenious idea which is calculated to have developments.

The central syndicate of the Agriculturists of France has secured special facilities in the Villette market for disposing of cattle and of farm-produce of all kinds. Finally, the Agricultural Union of France, a company with a capital of 1,100,000 francs, undertakes the sale on commission of the produce consigned to it by the syndicates or even by individual farmers, to whom it allots a 20 per cent. royalty on its profits. But what the co-operative associations do for agriculture in the matter of sales here at home, is nothing compared with what they might do for it on the foreign markets. The world-wide competition has grown to such a degree

that the struggle can no longer be carried on by individuals. We must call upon our associations to do battle for us against all the powerful associations arrayed against us. It is because, in spite of warnings, we have not yet realized the importance of doing this that we have been losing ground.

We are being distanced by a number of great countries, notably by the United States, Canada, and Italy, and even by quite small countries like Denmark, Sweden, and Belgium, all of whom are doing their best to supplant us everywhere with the help of their agricultural associations.

To the list of these rivals we must add Australia, New Zealand, and the Argentine Republic, which exports butter from the fertile plains of Rio Plata in highly perfected cold storage compartments on swift mail-boats. Not long ago, the steamship *Nile* unloaded 7500 casks of fresh and salt butter, which was sampled and found excellent.

On the English market, where twenty years ago we came first in regard to butter, we now come only third. Our exports had fallen in 1900 to 44,000,000 francs, while those of Denmark had risen to 22,600,000. Our exports of eggs have gone down 50 per cent.; from the first place we have sunk to the fifth, our exports amounting now

to 12,000,000 francs instead of 167,000,000. Our exports of cheese come to barely 1,500,000, though England alone buys 178,000,000 francs' worth. We export only 2,610,000 francs' worth of meat to England; Denmark, with its 26 co-operative slaughter-houses, exports 100,000,000.

Meanwhile, on the German market we have allowed our place to be taken by Italy, which sends it 70,000 tons of fruit and vegetables, and by other countries; out of 510,500 tons of fruit and vegetables imported by Germany from abroad, we supply only 43,000.

The principal reason of our decline is the lack of co-operation among our producers, their persistent holding aloof from each other; if only they had taken note of what was going on abroad, it would have been easy for them to see in what lay the strength of their competitors and their own weakness.

They had but to look at Denmark, which has become one of our most redoubtable rivals. Is it not surprising that this small country, with only 2,000,000 inhabitants, and with a climate infinitely less favourable than our own, should be selling to England 400,000,000 francs' worth of agricultural produce? That is more than we do.

For the sale of eggs alone, Denmark has

465 co-operative associations, which collect them from all the individual members, and then consign them to the central body, which represents the entire country. It is by reason of the vigilant control exercised over the quality of its merchandise, by its powerful organization, that Denmark has made such strides ahead. Its exports of eggs have risen from 134,000,000 in 1894 to 464,000,000 in 1903.

For the sale of butter Denmark has five large associations, one of which includes eighty-four dairies. All these stamp the butter exported with their own trade-mark, which enhances its value.

It would be unjust to pretend that France has taken no steps at all towards establishing similar institutions. Something has been done, but not enough. Our associations are still too few and too weak. We need a central body which should be in touch with the whole field of our agricultural exports, and which could be looked to for guidance and stimulus. As long as we lack this, we shall continue to be distanced by our rivals.

But in order that our associations may engage in the contest successfully, we must arm them with the weapons which, at present, are being used effectively against us by our

competitors. Of these the most important is economy of transport.

The need of quick and cheap methods of transport for agricultural produce is universally recognized. Goods are transported in Germany at rates 25 per cent. lower than with us, and far more quickly. It is absolutely necessary that our railway companies should decide to introduce improved methods of transport—they will find themselves repaid by the development of their traffic;* and it is equally essential that our agriculturists, on their side, should arouse themselves from their inertia, and form themselves into vast and powerful associations, capable of treating with the companies and offering them appreciable advantages. In this way it will be possible to bring about an entirely different state of things.

VIII

Much is being done, as we have seen, to educate our rural classes, scientifically and

* It must be admitted that the railway companies have not shown themselves entirely indifferent to the question. Those of the "Nord," of the "Ouest," and of the "Ceinture" have just followed the example already set them by the Paris-Lyons and the Orleans by drawing up a new special tariff for the accelerated transport of vegetables, which will give great satisfaction to our farmers in Normandy and Brittany.

technically, but we feel that this is not all—that we must strive also to instil in them a love for their labour, and to reinforce their numbers with new recruits. For this purpose, a different order of education is required, the chief end of which should be to bring out the beauties of nature, and the advantages of life in the fields.

This is a task for our school teachers who have the modelling of a child's mind. They need not be poets—a love of nature may be instilled into the child without any recourse to lyricism. The simplest lesson in natural history or chemistry serves as well as a poem; the study of the great phenomena of nature, and the marvellous manifestations of animal and vegetable life, raises the mind, and attaches it to the soil by widening its horizon.

Let us listen to what M. Louis Passy, permanent secretary of the National Society of Agriculture, had to say upon this subject in his recently published work, "Agriculture devant le Science"—

"Everything tends to convince one that agriculture will never be a real science. Just as the art of medicine deals with the human body with the help of all the natural sciences, so agriculture deals with the body of the earth,

but neither agriculture nor medicine can ever rely absolutely upon the outcome of its efforts. Certain rules of treatment carefully applied are calculated to produce certain results, but these results are not inevitable, like the results of chemistry or arithmetic.

"When man worked in haphazard fashion, agriculture was a trade; but it has become an art since man began to bring his mind to bear upon the work, and to learn how to exploit it by the best methods to the best advantage. Nature is an untiring instrument of production, working away by itself, following out mysterious laws of transformation; but she can do nothing by herself; she can but give herself generously to him who, by virtue of his intellect, is lord of all. Man is lord of all, but he also is powerless in himself and by himself, with Nature."

There is another branch of education which would contribute greatly to the improvement of the agricultural career, and which, unfortunately, is too much neglected in France, and that is the special training of girls when they have just left school. If a young girl is left to herself at this age, she is apt to be repelled by the rude labours of the farm, and to turn her eyes longingly towards the distractions of the town. This is the psychological

moment, therefore, to give her a taste for farm life by ennobling it in her eyes.

Schools of housekeeping have been established for this purpose in various countries, and in them the young girl is taught how a farm is managed. She is made to realize the importance and beauty of the existence of a farmer's wife, and all the interest that attaches to it, and in this way she is saved from the lot of the wives and daughters of clerks and functionaries. These schools have the further effect of keeping in the country large numbers of young men who, but for them, would be unable to find wives, and who would have drifted to the towns. Of all the methods of fostering the return to the land, this is one of the most effective.

In most foreign countries, the importance of this form of education is understood, and schools of the kind now described are now being conducted on the most practical lines. In Germany they are to be found in almost every province; and in Austria there are a number. In England there are horticultural schools and model dairy-farms. There is, moreover, an international league for the purpose of stimulating the employment of women in every branch of agriculture.

An agricultural institute has been recently founded in New York, in which the pupils are given a similar practical education, though "not to the exclusion of the social arts calculated to make of them attractive companions"—a formula worth our remembering, and quite to the liking of our young Frenchwomen.

In Canada, a school of agriculture for girls was instituted in 1892. The pupils are taught how to manage a poultry-yard, how to make butter and cheese, and how to keep farm accounts. The model farm upon which this school is installed covers more than eighty acres, and is worked entirely by women.

But of all the countries that have taken up woman's education in this direction, none has gone so far or done so much as Belgium.

The Belgian Government began by instituting courses of fifteen lessons in domestic economy in all the agricultural centres, for the benefit of women and girls. To these it added later a travelling dairy-school, which is located, now here, now there, for three months at a time, and which brings instruction within the reach of girls who are unable to attend the ordinary house-keeping classes. The regular house-keeping schools, which are of more recent origin in Belgium, are organized in three

sections. In the superior section, the course is very thorough-going, and includes careful instruction in the principles of hygiene and the study of bacteriology. The first of these institutions, at Virton, was founded in 1891, and it proved so great a success that nine others have since been established. At the end of 1898 there were in all 245 schools frequented by 9000 pupils. All these schools are attached to special farms, which the State merely subsidizes.

M. le Baron de la Bouillerie, in his report upon the Agricultural Education Exhibits shown at the Exhibition of 1900, explains that what impelled Belgium to activity, was the knowledge that the lack of women capable of managing farms was a prime cause of the rural exodus.

When shall we follow Belgium's example, instead of contenting ourselves with the very meagre education now provided by us?* When shall we make up our mind to provide real

* We have only three schools of the kind in the whole of France. Two of these—the one at Coetlogon near Rennes, and that of Kerliver (Finisterre)—are practical schools of dairy-farming. That at Coetlogon, which was founded twenty years ago, is a model of its kind; it was here that the Belgian women got their training, who were afterwards the first manageresses of the Belgian dairy-schools. The one other agricultural school in France is that at Monastier (Haute-Loire), established in 1902, at which there are only fifteen pupils.

agricultural training for women, evoking in them appreciation of the life of the country, and making them realize the dignity and utility of farm-work? Of all the reforms yet to be undertaken in the interests of agriculture, there is none more important or more pressing than this.

STATE AID

CHAPTER VI

STATE AID

I

HAVING examined into the direct methods to be employed for raising the status of agriculture and making it more lucrative, let us glance now at those indirect means, as they may be styled, which are able to exert so potent an influence in the same direction.

There is, to begin with, one great source of discouragement to the agriculturist which might be provided against, and which does not trouble the prudent man of business—the fact, namely, that he is at the mercy of the weather and also of cattle-disease. This sword of Damocles spoils his existence, and often is the cause of his forsaking the land, and taking to some more secure occupation, in which, at least, he need have no anxiety as to the morrow. This is in part the explanation of the notable tendency on the part of young farmers to seek employment, no matter how obscure, in our

public offices. The son has heard the father bemoaning a sudden frost that has ruined his splendid crops, or some disease that has carried off all his cattle, and he has said to himself, "This isn't the kind of life for me."

There is a remedy, however, for this evil. The agriculturist of to-day is able to provide to a great extent against the worst calamities that can befall him. He has but to take out a policy from the insurance agencies, so largely subsidized by the Government, in order to feel at ease in his mind as to the possibility of his wealth in cattle being suddenly lost.

Insurance against hailstorms is not yet so practicable, there being at present too many agencies in this branch, and too few clients; in consequence, the risks taken are high and the premiums correspondingly so. There is room in this direction for developments and improvements.

There is nothing to prevent the organizing of insurance policies also—though this will be a more delicate business—against the dangers of frost, and there seems little doubt that they will come in time. Why should not all the agriculturists in a particular district, of wide extent, constitute themselves into a mutual benefit society, whose end should be to indemnify, at

least in part, those members whose crops were spoilt by the frost?

But we must go beyond these things, and place at the disposal of our rural population all those benevolent institutions hitherto reserved exclusively for our towns.

It must be frankly admitted that, until quite recently, our country districts have been entirely and shamefully neglected in this respect; "everything for the towns" would seem to have been the order of the day, the programme of all our ministries and all our parliaments. The explanation is quite simple. The people in the towns constitute the most active and important voters, making their voices heard, and securing obedience to their wishes; and their needs are admirably served by a Press still more energetic, which flatters them in order to maintain and extend its own power, as well as by innumerable politicians vieing against each other with promises which one of these days may have to be fulfilled.

The Government is afraid of them, and does everything it can to give them satisfaction, paying little or no attention to these inarticulate peasants, who are so resigned to their lot and whose patience is so wonderful.

When a workman falls ill or meets with an

accident, there are hospitals to welcome him and the most skilful doctors and surgeons at his service; if he sinks into destitution and cannot support his family, there is State aid available for him and assistance from all kinds of philanthropic institutions; if, through age and infirmities, he has got beyond work, he can go to an asylum for the old.

The country labourers know of these things nowadays, and it is because they know of them that they long for the towns, where one can always rely upon having a kindly hand held out to one, and where one can sleep tranquilly in the thought that, in case of need, one will never be at a loss for a friend.

If we are to keep upon the land, or bring back to the land, not merely the labourers and small farmers, but also the small landowners, we must try to do for them what is done for the towns. We live in an age when every one seeks security and ease of mind before anything else. This feeling becomes more and more intensified as the struggle for life waxes more and more fierce and bitter. The day when our rural districts are provided for as our towns are now, the cause of agriculture will prove victorious.

And it is to be admitted, I am glad to say, that during the last ten years Parliament and our

public bodies have begun to understand better their duties in this matter—perhaps because our rural population is beginning to realize and to give signs of their political force, and to make their voices heard.

The advantages they have won are not to be despised, and are already making themselves felt; the law providing them with medical aid without payment, for instance, and that which helps toward the upkeep of children in the case of the poorest families.

These things are a good beginning, but they are only a beginning. When shall we have the hospitals, the dispensaries, the almshouses? It will be said, perhaps, that it is not practicable to have hospitals in every village in France. Doubtless, but it should be practicable to have a small hospital in every canton, or at least one between several. A simple farmhouse could be utilized for the purpose—no need to erect expensive buildings.*

* In the Canton of Corcieux, which I have the honour of representing in the general Council of the Vosges, a simple peasant, endowed with the soul of an apostle, took it on himself to do what neither the State, nor the Département, nor the Canton had seen their way to undertake. He turned his modest dwelling into an asylum for the old and infirm, whom he picked up in the neighbourhood. With the help of his sister as hospital-nurse, he carried on this ungrateful and disheartening work for a long time alone. As he was not well off, he was

II

But prevention is better than cure, and what is above all desirable is that our working-classes in the country should be taught to put away a little money during their good years, the years of robust health and plentiful harvests, as a reserve for their bad years and their old age. The savings may be minute if only they are begun early and persevered in to the end. Quite a small effort suffices to provide a competence for a man's declining years and to guarantee his family against want in the event of his death.

Unfortunately, here again we find the same disparity between the state of things in the town and in the country. Doubtless, the law is not exclusively responsible for this disparity; the National savings-banks, which provide old-age

obliged to get his patients to do a little work for him, and each did what he could, thus defraying, in part, the cost of maintenance. His benevolence met with its due reward. The good Nicolo (such is the name of this modest hero) was accorded the "Prix Montyon." He spent the money in developing and improving his establishment. Now the Commune of Corcieux and certain neighbouring Communes make contribution for the care of their sick, and the State has now shown its recognition of him by granting him a subvention from the *Pari Mutuel*. Thus the Nicolo Hospital has become a perfect model of such rural institutions. Others might be established for almost nothing.

pensions, are open alike to the workers in the fields and the factory hands. Neither class makes much use of them, because the Frenchman is by nature improvident, and his education in economics has still to be brought about. To induce him to sacrifice a little in the present for his security in the future, you must take him by the hand and lead him. He is incapable of doing so by himself, though he will follow with the stream.

In the world of manufacturing, there is never any lack of philanthropic employers, and many great establishments have organized provident funds for their workmen, which they themselves support generously, requiring the men to contribute only the smallest sums as an earnest of their wish to put by.

But if the first impulse came from the manufacturers, the movement owes its full and flourishing growth to those mutual benefit societies which, since the beneficent law of 1898, have been extending more and more their field of action in regard to old-age pensions, and which have recently been making such immense progress. Thanks to them, we are coming within sight of the goal, and if only the Government does not interfere with them, and does not seek to substitute the heavy hand of the State for

the supple energy of individuals, all will be well. There is no reason why this movement, still confined to the towns, should not be extended now to the country, where private charity is not munificent, and where, in consequence, the mutual benefit principle is most needed. And, as a matter of fact, an effort towards introducing them in the rural districts is now being made.

The mutual benefit societies will lead to savings-banks, in regard to which also a beginning has been made. Certain large syndicates have laid the basis of an organization which is now in full working order, and the first results of which are most satisfactory; the way had already been opened for it by the Gardeners' Mutual Benefit Society of the Seine, founded fifty years ago, but hitherto unique of its kind. It is not until 1896 that we find another mutual benefit society created by the Castelnaudary syndicate, through the initiative of M. de Laurens-Castalet. And it is only since 1898, and as the result of the law passed in that year, that the movement has been given new strength by the establishment in the Charente-Inférieure of two other such agricultural societies taking into their operations the whole of the *département.* The Château-Thierry Society, founded by the

distinguished agriculturist M. Carré, is another instance in point.

The strongest combination of these agricultural benefit societies may be said to be represented by the union of the syndicates of the south-east, a body always in the van of progress, thanks to the initiative and indefatigable devotion of its President, M. Emile Duport. According to their report, they comprised in 1904, twenty-nine certificated societies for mutual succour for the granting of pensions in illness or old age.

When these associations have been established all over the country, the intellectual and moral transformation of the agriculturist will come about of its own accord, and he will no longer want to quit the soil; even those who have abandoned it in an access of ill-humour, and who have experienced the life of the towns, will avail themselves of any opportunity offered them of returning to their home.

For it would be a mistake to believe that the peasant is dissatisfied with his lot simply because he is worn out by the work and yearns for a more comfortable existence. He loves the soil too much for that; and the labour it demands from him, however hard, does not go against the grain, for it is interesting and full of

variety, and he has the sort of feeling for it that an artist has for his picture. If there were not at the root of the peasant's mind this unconquerable attachment to the soil, there would be no one left to cultivate it.

If he ends by giving way to discouragement, that is because the work does not recompense him sufficiently, because bad years come oftener than good, and above all because he has no sense of security for the morrow. Under the pressure of this anxiety which tortures him unceasingly, he snatches at any of the other careers that promise him the certainty of a roof to his head in his old age. That is why he becomes a postman, or a railway *employé*, or a customs-house officer—even a street scavenger. It is not the career itself, or the higher pay that tempts him—it is the provision for his future. He sacrifices everything for this one consideration.

III

The extent of the rural exodus comes out clearly from the official statistics as to our agricultural population. These tell us the number of peasant proprietors went down from 1,134,000 in 1862 to 727,000 in 1882. In 1902, it

had sunk to 589,000. This state of affairs is lamentable indeed. The remedy exists, luckily, and for a long time past has been known and put into practice. It came to us from America under the name of "Homestead," or "rights of the family," a kind of democratic endowment, created for the benefit of the very poor, to guarantee them an untroubled fireside, sheltered from the storms of life.

The house and bit of land constituting this "homestead" form an inalienable patrimony. It cannot fall into the hands of creditors except under certain specified circumstances. The father of the family can get his belongings constituted a homestead, simply by making a certain set declaration. Thenceforward he himself cannot make away with it or mortgage it without the written consent of his wife. After his death, the homestead remains undivided in the hands of his widow and children under age.

In England, the country of large landowners, the Government employs different methods for democratising the division of land. The County Councils and the municipalities make purchases of land, which they dispose of in allotments at very low prices to workmen and small farmers.

In Norway and Sweden, in Denmark and in

Switzerland, the State itself, through the medium of loan societies, advances money to labourers to enable them to become proprietors.

In Germany, the small landowner, by making a declaration, can prevent the dividing up of his property on his decease. He may bequeath it to one of his heirs, subject to a payment by way of compensation to the co-heirs. This system, known by the name of *Auerbenrecht*, has the disadvantage of driving the co-heirs to the towns, and often of forcing the heir either to go into debt or actually to sell the property in order to raise enough money to pay the compensation money imposed upon him.

In France, matters could be arranged more easily than anywhere else. Ours is a country of small farms, where there is never any difficulty in getting land cheap. Doubtless it is not as yet accessible to everybody; some small capital is required, but nothing could be easier than to advance to would-be purchasers the quite small sum required.

The experience of the agricultural mutual loan societies, extending now over a period of ten years, is there to tell us that there is no more conscientious debtor than the agriculturist; if he does not always pay on the date fixed, he

always pays in the end. The bad debts of these institutions are insignificant.

The problem has been under consideration for so long in France that it is remarkable it has not yet been solved. Numerous proposals are put before Parliament under every new ministry. After that of M. Léveillé, brought forward in 1895, the most important and most carefully thought out is certainly that of the Abbé Lemire. And M. Ruan, our present Minister of Agriculture, has recently submitted a very thorough-going bill dealing with the subject.

According to this measure, carefully elaborated by the Council of State after its examination in the Courts of Appeal, the document establishing the "Bien de Famille," to cover real estate to the maximum value of 8000 francs, is received by a notary, and due legal publicity is given to it by its transcription at the Mortgage Office together with a manuscript announcement at the Town Hall. In principle the "Bien" is declared to be inalienable and not to be mortgaged; but the qualifications are so numerous that it is questionable whether its efficacy be not destroyed. Thus, the "Bien" may be seized when a debt has been contracted for goods supplied within six months by retail tradesmen, such as butchers, bakers, and grocers. That is

a very elastic and very dangerous exception, which is open to abuses, and which may allow the bailiff to come in by the window when shut out at the door.

The proprietor retains also the unfettered right, according to this measure, to sell his "Bien" with the consent of his wife, which, of course, he can always secure. He can sell it the day after it has been so constituted, or at any subsequent period. This gives his creditors a certain power over him. To protect him against their assaults and against his own weakness, would it not be possible to fix a certain period within which this right of sale could not be exercised? It can hardly be objected that this would be a blow at the rights of property. No one is obliged to have his property rendered inalienable, and if this privilege be accorded, the legislature is surely entitled to attach to it conditions without which the object in view could not be attained.

The establishment of the "Bien de Famille" will not only be profitable to agricultural labourers and peasant proprietors, to whom it will mean freedom from anxiety, and to the larger landowners, for whom it will be the means of providing an abundance of the best manual labour, it will also have a most beneficial effect

upon our social life generally, and prove the most solid guarantee of the tranquillity of the land.

Boissy d'Anglas, in his famous report to the National Convention of 5 Messidor year III, set forth the political and social *rôle* of the rights of property in clear relief, and made clear to the Governments of the future its beneficent effects. "A country governed by proprietors," he said, "is in a state of society; one governed by non-proprietors is in a state of nature." This eternal truth, according to which property is the corner-stone of well-ordered communities, is the condemnation of the Collectivist doctrine, according to which individual ownership should be replaced by the ownership of all; it points the way to the Democratic State, showing it its duty to extend indefinitely the field of individual property by making it accessible to all.

The "Homestead" will have an advantage of another, priceless kind, in that it will meet one of the chief hindrances to the return to the land —the impossibility of ensuring the labourer permanent employment. The great agricultural enterprises are by their very nature intermittent, and the labourer, under this new *régime*, will be able to devote to his own holding the time he is not earning wages in the service of others. He

will double the *rôle* of day labourer with that of small farmer.

There is another force which is destined soon to play an important part in the evolution of agriculture — electricity. In a country like France, where waterfalls abound, electricity may produce incalculable results. There will be nothing to prevent the installation in our farms, even those most remote from the great centres, of motive power sufficient for many industries. There are a number that need only a fraction of horse-power, and there are small dynamos which take up very little room, and which would be available for several machines. These dynamos make no noise and give out no smell or heat, so that the work could be carried on under the most hygienic conditions.

From the standpoint of morals, the outcome of this new development should be more considerable still. Of all the ways of enticing the labourer away from drink and vice, there is none better than that of reconstituting his family life by bringing about work in common in the home.

VILLAGE LIFE.
THE PUBLIC HEALTH

CHAPTER VII

VILLAGE LIFE. THE PUBLIC HEALTH

I

WE have finished now with what we may call the scientific side of the agricultural problem, but we should not be dealing adequately with the question if we were to stop here, and remained in the dark as to a side of it which is too often overlooked and which deserves more attention.

Man is a sensitive being and does not live on bread alone. He has spiritual needs and is never happy if there be not in his life, however humble it may be, some touch of idealism; as education and civilization advance, this form of enjoyment occupies an increasingly important place in the aspirations of mankind. If people get through more work than formerly, they require also more intellectual recreation and amusement.

These new needs have become an essential factor in our agricultural life which cannot be

overlooked. The country is more and more assuming the character of the town; the infinite facilities of communication, which now enable the peasant to get into town as often as he chooses and to indulge in forms of pleasure which were until recently unknown to him, have gradually modified his ideas to such a degree that his village has come to seem to him dull and depressing.

We would assuredly not dream of advocating the introduction into our villages of all the seductive and too often immoral attractions of city life—this would be no less impossible than undesirable; but without going as far as that, nothing could be more easy than to impart to our village life a little more brightness and variety—to do a little more for the mind and for the eyes—to increase the number of occasions for wholesome and inexpensive pleasure. What is there to prevent us from substituting for the sombre, stuffy *cabaret*, so lugubrious of aspect that it really drives its *habitués* to drink, a neat, clean *café*, elegant and well-lit, in which a man could seek rest agreeably *en famille?* This would be a means of contending against the deadly vice of alcoholism which we venture to commend to the consideration of our temperance societies. They could

co-operate in this work with the agricultural associations, which are eminently well qualified for undertaking any form of amelioration of the conditions of village life. Other such innovations might be musical societies, shooting clubs, and gymnasia—all calculated to lend animation and to bring people together.

All these things are easy enough really to bring about. Why, then, do they not come into existence? Simply for the lack of men with the necessary initiative and energy to set them going. The countryman is by nature timid, distrustful, and economical, and unready to take the lead in any kind of novel enterprise. He is kept back by his fear of what people will say, and his dislike of responsibilities; but he is ready enough to follow a good lead and to join in when he sees work being done that strikes him as useful and agreeable.

Where are we to find this indispensable person, this bell-wether to lead our flock? He must be a bit above the ordinary inhabitants of the commune, and he must be a man of some independence of mind as well as of means, capable of imposing his authority. He must, generally speaking, be a townsman of some sort, with all a townsman's knowledge of the art of enjoyment, whilst imbued with a keen

interest in the life of the country; living in the country a great part of his time.

The type, unfortunately, is now much rarer than it was fifty years ago.

II

Side by side with the irresistible attractions of city life there is another cause which has helped a good deal to stimulate the immigration into the towns and the exodus from the country, and that is the craving for employment by the State. This is really one of the worst maladies from which France suffers, full of danger for our future. It has taken on larger proportions during the last twenty years. The sons of our *bourgeois* class, followed by those of our peasants, have tumbled over each other in their frantic efforts at getting into the civil service, while fathers and mothers from the moment of the birth of a son begin day-dreaming as to the kind of post that will suit him best: that of magistrate, *sous-préfet*, or *polytechnicien!* The whole life of the family is regulated in accordance with these grandiose ambitions; they must make their way into the town to see to the education of their small prodigy and to establish

a good connection for him before launching him on his career. Thus they abandon their country home for good, never again to revisit it.*

This lamentable frame of mind is fortunately being modified profoundly by a number of causes. The violence of our political passions, which does so much harm in other ways, has, at least, had one beneficial effect in discouraging many fathers from office-seeking on behalf of their sons. The spirit of persecution which has grown up in parliamentary circles has brought with it so great a degree of instability into our public service that people are beginning to hold aloof from it; now that it lacks the absolute security which was its sole charm, it has no attractions.

This tendency may save us from many dangers by giving back to our *bourgeoisie* the energy and virility it too often lacks. When its children make up their minds to enter into the battle of life and make a position for themselves, when they decide to start businesses or cultivate land of their own, at home or in our

* In the district of the prefecture of the Seine alone, we hear of 30,000 applications for the post of *cantonnier*, 7000 for that of office boy, 5000 for that of *concierges* in schools—over 50,000 applicants for how many posts?—perhaps 400.

colonies, the naturally strong sap in our French blood will begin to rise once more, and we shall cease to be a flock of sheep, and begin again to be a race of free men.

There will be a means of hastening this desirable change and bringing about our transformation, and this will be by beginning the all-important work of decentralization—one of the most important tasks before us now and entirely neglected by Parliament. This must be taken in hand soon, unless France is to succumb under the burden of taxation and its bureaucracy. Why should we not apply to the services of the State the formula which tends to the success of business concerns, and which should govern every branch of human activity: a less numerous *personnel*, working hard and well remunerated?

Let this formula be put boldly into practice, let the productive forces of the country have the benefit of all the intelligence and energy now dormant in the dull atmosphere of the office, and we shall see a reflowering of agriculture, strengthened by the living forces of which she has been too long deprived. And, at the same time, we shall be bringing back to the soil the capital of which she is so much in want.

III

For it is the desertion of the land by the *bourgeoisie* that, by narrowing the ranks of its purchasers, has led the bulk of the capitalists to class rural property as a bad investment and to take their money elsewhere. When they see the well-to-do *bourgeois* giving up his country estate and settling in town, they say to themselves that it is much better for them to buy railway shares or Government bonds, which will always be negotiable, than to encumber themselves with possessions of which they may be unable afterwards to dispose.

On the other hand, when they see the *bourgeois* class settling down again in the country, and taking pride and pleasure in his estate, and its members vieing with each other in their efforts to secure the richest soil and best sites, the value of landed property will go up with a rush. This is made certain by the fact that already in certain parts of France, where the *bourgeoisie* has begun again to seek out pleasant retreats, there is to be noted a considerable rise in prices.

The tendency in the world of finance is at present all in favour of investments in land.

The value of personal estate is going down, while that of real estate is going up. There can be no question to-day that a landed property which is well managed, and is not stinted as regards capital, is a better investment than State bonds.

The manufacturing industries, of course, still retain their fascination for those in a hurry to become rich. But, alas! the golden days of industry are gone by, and will never be seen again. Industrial profits are becoming daily less and less; to be convinced of this we have but to glance at the reports of the countless companies, even those best managed, which for years past have been yielding contemptible dividends of 2 or 3 per cent., when they have been able to declare a dividend at all. For industrial risks are increasing, and side by side with the firms that succeed must be placed those which are ruined, or which are living upon their capital.

When these striking comparisons have been fully noted, capital will begin gradually to forsake industry for agriculture. And this will be a great benefit for industry itself. Too great an influx of capital is for it an irresistible temptation, drawing it into undue efforts and expansion, and helping to bring

about that state of over-production for which we are seeking the remedy.

We must not quarrel with capital over this. We must not exclaim "Out upon capital!" as did M. Vaillant in the Chamber of Deputies. No, capital is a benefactor, and M. Vaillant is ungrateful when he attacks it; he forgets that it is capital that gives employment to the labourer and enables him to earn his wages. But it is better that capital should not settle exclusively on one spot, lest it should thus help to create a disastrous obstruction. M. Vaillant's mistake is to condemn capital itself, when he should be condemning merely its bad distribution—the sole cause of the evil he deplores; when capital is well distributed, it will continue its beneficent work, and harmony will be restored to the world of labour.

IV

Popular literature might have a great *rôle* to play in this work of moral and social regeneration; it might help largely in changing the ideas and habits and character both of our townsfolk and of our countryfolk, and in modifying their conceptions of life and of happiness.

Unfortunately, it seems more and more to forget this noble educative mission. When it is not marked by a pornographic tendency which is one of the most pernicious evils of our time, it is apt to do nothing but minister to our lowest appetites and most violent passions; it spreads out before our eyes a mass of hideous scenes as though in the endeavour to turn men into beasts.

In opposition to this decadent literature, fortunately, there has been coming into existence for some years past something very different—a literature of the future, full of appreciation for all that is beautiful, the beauty of nature, the beauty of strong, sane manhood, the beauty of the inner life; it appeals to the noblest feelings of the human soul, and endeavours to reawaken in it the taste for simplicity of life and the joys of home.

It is from this new theme that M. René Bazin has drawn his striking and moving scenes in his splendid book, "La Terre qui meurt."

Nothing could better serve the cause of morality than this work, which deserves to be read and reflected upon by everybody. It would make the sons of the *bourgeois* realize how easily a man goes to his ruin when he runs after money, and is not content with the

life of modest comfort and security that the land provides for those who cling to it. It would make them appreciate the advantages of this large, serene, independent existence, in which a man may find the maximum of well-being to be got anywhere in the world.

To the peasant, tempted to give way because he finds the work too hard and the wages too scanty, it would show that in the towns also everything is not *couleur de rose*, that the pleasures to be enjoyed there are often paid for dearly, and that at every step misery and despair stand in wait for the poor wretches who fall victims to the *mirage* of city life.

This, indeed, is an opportune moment for embarking upon a crusade in favour of the land, for the public seems disposed to listen. There can be no doubt that there is a spirit abroad leading our countrymen into new fields. The reaction against the life of the town is growing stronger, while the call of the country daily gathers strength and is becoming irresistible.

Everything contributes to this instinctive and deep-laid tendency: the lassitude of our townsmen; their weariness of a life always unwholesome and disturbed; the outbreaks of political, religious, and social conflicts, that

produce a craving for peace and quiet, and make men turn their eyes longingly towards the tranquil countryside; above all, the ruin of constitutions brought about by the ill-ordered existence of our towns.

For there can be no doubt that the principal cause of all the insidious and mysterious maladies so prevalent to-day, but almost unknown to our fathers—all the different forms of nervous affections, hypochondria, neurasthenia, anæmia of the brain, and tuberculosis—are due to the vitiated atmosphere in which our degenerate civilization has plunged the human species during the last half-century. This unnatural existence, against which the funds of health and strength we inherited from our ancestors were able for a while to hold out, has ended by undermining our physique and baffling all remedies.*

Long ago, in *Emile*, Jean-Jacques Rousseau prophesied the dangers impending over the

* The state of things in Paris is terrible. It appears from a communication made recently by Professor Grancher to the Academy of Medicine, that one out of every six children attending the public schools suffers from consumption. Another physician, Dr. George Bourgeois, has demonstrated very conclusively that the countryfolk transplanted to Paris, the *déracinés* as they are very aptly styled, furnish a much more numerous contingent to death from tuberculosis than the Parisians by birth.

generations to come. "Men," he said, "were never meant to be heaped up together in ant-hills, they were to be scattered sparsely over the soil which they should be cultivating. Infirmities of the body and vices of the mind are the inevitable outcome of too densely packed masses of human beings. Of all the animals, man is by nature least gregarious. Men penned up together like sheep must soon perish. Their very breath is poisonous to each other—not merely physically but morally as well. Towns are the abysses of the human race. At the end of several generations, races will be degenerating or perishing, and will have to be renewed. And it will be always from the country that the renewal will come."

Michelet said the same thing more succinctly and with a charming touch of poetry: "Of all the flowers, the flower of humanity stands most in need of the sun."

The art of medicine is at the end of its resources, and having exhausted all its means, has come at last to the same conclusions as these two great thinkers.* It has said to itself

* An eminent economist who is at the same time a philanthropist of boundless devotion, M. Cheysson, has recently dealt with this topic in a very remarkable document addressed to the Office Central des Œuvres de Bienfaisance, under the

that to suppress a disease you must first of all remove its cause, and it has ended by proclaiming that the only real remedy is to be found in a return to nature, to the life for which we were intended, life in the open, with its peace and quiet.

Thus it is that fresh-air cures have come to be the basis of medical treatments, the universal remedy for most of the diseases which afflict mankind to-day. The sanatorium has become ubiquitous, it is to be found everywhere. In certain regions of the Alps one scarcely knows where to take refuge, if one wishes to avoid the neighbourhood of the innumerable victims of the malady of the century.

But the sanatorium is not a solution; it is a desperate expedient which may prove more dangerous than the evil itself. It may cure the invalid, but it may propagate the disease and cause it to become ineradicable. What is preferable to the sanatorium is individual isolation—permanent isolation in the midst of the reinvigorating pure air of the fields.

If "nature treatment" is not always enough in itself to cure inveterate disease, it is at least an infallible system for keeping it away. All

title "La Misère provinciale à Paris." The remedy he advocates is ours—the return to the land.

you who are in fear as to your children's health, who live in perpetual anxiety at the sight of their pallid, sickly faces, *do not hesitate*—if you wish to save these little beings who are so dear to you, have the courage to come to one of those great and strong decisions that sometimes mean the saving of health and life. Go off with your children to the fields, and try to leave them there as long as possible—altogether, if you can. Thanks to the revivifying bath of country air, you will see them bloom afresh.

V

Much has recently been done by our philanthropists to enable our working classes in the towns to indulge the love of nature which has been making so much headway everywhere. One great society in particular has done wonders in this direction. Founded by M. l'Abbé Lemire and M. Louis Rivière, following in the footsteps of that large-hearted woman, Mme. Hervieu, the Workman's Garden Society has undertaken to place gardens at the disposal of workmen's families in the cities, either free of cost or for a very moderate subscription in cases where a man wishes to become absolute proprietor at some quite low price.

The idea was so good and wise that it soon won the support of generous and sympathetic minds, as the results of ten years' work suffice to show. In 1903 it had arranged for no fewer than 6458 gardens, distributed among 294 groups of workmen, and covering in all more than 500 acres.

The movement is well launched therefore, and everything seems to promise that it will make its way into every part of France. It is to be hoped that it will go deeper too, and that it will help to cure one of our most painful and disquieting maladies—that of vagabondage.

On the 15th of December, 1807, Napoleon I., in a brief access of philanthropy, wrote to his Minister of the Interior: "By the beginning of the season of beauty, France must present the spectacle of a country without beggars." Alas! that season of beauty has been a long time coming, and the number of beggars has multiplied so since 1807 that now they constitute an army of 400,000 vagabonds that Napoleon himself would not have dealt with easily.

We have already spoken of the way in which our countryside is ravaged by these vagrants, who at certain periods of the year descend upon it like clouds of locusts. The sense of insecurity involved by this plague has counted

for a good deal in the desertion of the rural districts, and especially in the depreciation of isolated estates.

Unfortunately, the gendarmes cannot be everywhere, and no matter how their number might be increased, they would always prove insufficient to deal with vagabondage until the extent of this trouble has been reduced within the narrowest possible limits. It is the plague itself that must be coped with, if it is to be circumscribed and extirpated. We must find some means of rooting these vagrants to the soil and thus putting an end to their nomadic existence.

The country that has best understood the necessity of this, and that has found the most ingenious and practical method of carrying it out is Holland, long famous for its State aids to work, and especially work upon the land. So far back as 1818, General van den Bosch had the happy thought of finding work for numbers of unemployed who appealed to him for assistance; he built a series of farms, which he placed collectively at their disposal, giving preference, naturally, to the most hard-working and deserving. To-day the society which owes its origin to this philanthropic act affords employment to over 2000 people. That is nothing very great,

assuredly, even in a small country like Holland; but the idea has developed greatly and borne other fruit since 1818. A law of 1843 authorized communes which possessed waste lands to dispose of them in allotments at reduced prices to people out of work. At Francken, the public savings bank deals similarly with ground belonging to it. At Uithuizen, there is a benevolent society which has acquired about sixteen acres of ground, and divided it up amongst 197 individuals, at a total rent of 833 florins. Certain societies, too, have made arrangements for enabling tenants to become proprietors on easy terms.

We could cite instances of many other such institutions in Holland, but enough has been said to demonstrate that there is no better or safer way of preventing vagabondage than by this of rooting the vagrant upon the soil.

In France we have hitherto merely lamented things and appealed to the public authorities. A few prefects, not wholly absorbed in politics, have given their attention and efforts to the matter. The one who has achieved the best results is undoubtedly M. Alapetite, prefect of the Pas-de-Calais, who has understood that the only way of dealing with the vagabond was to find him work and a settled place to do it in.

He began by instituting a depôt for his *département*, and hence all alien vagrants were sent off to whatever other *département* they belonged to. Those left were installed in yards and set to work breaking stones, at a wage of from 1 franc 50 to 3 francs the cube metre. Women were employed plaiting straw, etc.

The expenses involved do not exceed 15,000 francs a year, a small sum considering the excellent results, for the *département* of the Pas-de-Calais has thus been set free from a veritable plague.

But such methods should be supplemented by the Dutch system of State aid to the land. Why should not small farms, subventioned by the Government and by the *département*, be established all over France, and be allotted to the most deserving specimens among these tramps, who might thus be transformed into flourishing small tenant-proprietors?

ARTISANS AND PEASANTS

CHAPTER VIII

ARTISANS AND PEASANTS

I

THE problem we have been studying—that of modifying and amending the present conditions of the labour market by restoring the equilibrium between manufacture and agriculture—has been made the subject of a very profound study by one of the most conspicuous leaders of the Socialist party in Belgium, Mr. Vandervelde, in his work, "L'Exode rural et le retour aux champs," recently published.

M. Vandervelde has been impressed, like every one else, by the rapidity with which the rural population has pressed into the cities, there to stifle and come to grief; and he views with alarm the change that has ensued in the conditions alike of labour and of the home. His examination of the facts under his eyes, together with the statistics he has drawn up so conscientiously, has led him quite close to the truth; and he would have arrived at the truth itself, had

he not been under the sway of a pre-conceived doctrine which has entirely falsified the results.

For M. Vandervelde, the manufacturing class is far superior to the agricultural class, simply because it has, in his eye, the advantage of being educated according to Socialist ideas and qualified in this way for taking its share in the social revolution now in progress. The peasant seems to him an inferior being, narrow-minded, egoistic, obstinate, impenetrable to new ideas. "However great," he says, "may be the evils engendered by the concentration in cities, this state of things has at least the inestimable advantage in our eyes of wresting thousands of individuals out of the mental inertia, the cribbed and cabined individualism which characterize the great bulk of our agricultural population."

Starting from this standpoint, it is not surprising that M. Vandervelde is but little preoccupied with the amelioration of the lot of the existing rural classes, and that he is so easily reconciled to that exodus whose disastrous effects, from an agricultural point of view, he analyses so carefully in the earlier chapters of his book. He regards it simply as something decreed by Fate, inevitable and irreparable; he does not believe in the possibility of bringing the workers back to the land. But as he can

hardly end with a mere negation after painting so convincing and distressing a picture, he finds a *via media*, and proposes simply to make semi-agriculturists out of artisans, contriving for them the benefits of a country existence by way of counteracting the hardships of life in the cities.

To this end he points out as a first method that which exists already in Belgium and which he would like to see adopted elsewhere; this consists in transporting the home of the workmen out of the slums into the rural suburbs and even into the open country. In this way the father of the family can earn his living in the city, while his wife keeps house in the country and cultivates, with the help of their children, the bit of land which provides cheaply for some part of their needs.

In Belgium this system is carried out on a large scale, and no one is better placed than M. Vendervelde for observing its results. It is made practicable by the co-operation of the railway companies, who run workmen's trains at extremely reduced rates. The number of Belgium workmen who live under these conditions is estimated at 100,000.

M. Vandervelde, however, does not disguise the fact that this system has its drawbacks; he draws a saddening picture of the workman,

getting up an hour, or even two hours, before the opening of the factory, hurrying to catch his train, and then returning home, utterly exhausted, at ten o'clock at night. It is hard to see what good he gets out of the arrangement, however beneficial it may be to his family. The amount of fresh air he enjoys between ten at night and five in the morning can scarcely compensate him for the taxation on his energies that is involved in the journey to and fro.

II

M. Vandervelde himself, recognizing that this is the weak point of the system, proceeds to put forward a plan which is infinitely more practical, and which he himself regards as the *dernier mot* of progress: instead of transporting the artisan into the country, he proposes to transplant the factory itself. This, in truth, would be an ideal state of affairs, if it could be effected by the waving of a wand. To support his contention, M. Vandervelde records with satisfaction that this movement has for some time past been in evolution for reasons which he deplores, but with happy consequences which he welcomes.

He notes that many manufacturers remove their works into the country in order to make a saving in wages, and to remove their men from the contagious influence of revolutionary societies. It's an ill wind that blows nobody good, he reflects philosophically. At least the workmen are in this way better housed, have less expenses, they breathe fresh air, and are able to go in for a little gardening. This is the true solution, he concludes, the only possible solution, of the problem. Thus are combined the advantages of the agriculturist's healthy surroundings and the artisan's higher pay.

This combination is, in truth, a very happy one, and we unite with M. Vandervelde in recommending it most strongly — we wish cordially to see factories thus transplanted, and the workers exchanging joyfully the ugly amusements of their city life for the wholesome atmosphere of the country.

In England, this system has been applied in a way that approaches to perfection. Starting from the idea that our existing towns have been built haphazard fashion, without a plan, without proper provision for hygienic conditions, the founders of these rural cities sought to show that nothing could be simpler than to reconcile the well-being of the workmen with the needs

of the business and the economizing of expense. The project thus stated seems so simple, ingenuous almost, that it brings a cynical smile to the lips.

In truth, it is easier said than done. All our cities, even the largest, were at one time in the country. Paris itself for many centuries was nothing but a vast park—almost a forest. It is the force of things that has prevailed gradually to transform it into the serried mass of human habitations now familiar to us. It is regrettable, no doubt, from a hygienic standpoint, but how are such things to be prevented?

Nothing easier, exclaim our generous reformers, eager to remould the world anew into its original shape. Let us leave existing cities as they are, as it is unfortunately too late to set them right; but let us start afresh now, profiting by experience, and prevent mankind from falling back into the old disastrous ruts. Let us build new cities on open spaces, upon plans dictated by hygiene, brotherly love, and common sense, making in advance such provisions as will prevent our work from being injuriously affected by any whims of the inhabitants; let us contrive an insuperable barrier to this by so arranging our plan as to leave a certain amount of unoccupied ground, to be touched by nobody,

round all the houses and churches and workshops. And let us so enrich the whole with flowers and foliage as to justify the use of the term "Garden City."

These garden cities are to-day a reality. In the face of several thriving specimens of them, the system can no longer be regarded as Utopian. It is only natural that the idea should have its birth in England, where it comes to fruit under the most favourable conditions—in that land of wide acres and enterprising spirits, as well as of large fortunes capable of enjoying the luxury of embarking upon big schemes.

III

It would seem impossible to find a more complete and perfect organization of a manufacturing business combined with country life than those which have recently come into being, and are now in full operation at Port Sunlight and Bournville. These two garden cities are the creation of two great English manufacturers, as notable for their practical minds as for their ardent philanthropy.

The first, Mr. Lever, is the great soap manufacturer, who, after making a colossal

fortune, took it into his head one day to transplant his factories right into the country, to a site admirably chosen, constructing hard by them a model village, with spacious avenues and pretty cottages, comfortable as well as artistic—the whole enriched by trees and meadows. These habitations, at the most modest cost, he placed at the disposal of his employees.

It was another great manufacturer, Mr. Cadbury, who constructed the similar village of Bournville. French working-men who read the account given of these two Edens by M. Bénoit Lévy in his recent book, will yearn for fresh air and be unwilling any longer to shut themselves up in the squalid holes in which they are confined in the towns.

Unfortunately, many are called but few are chosen, and these two splendid model cities are still exceptions even in England. Such creations are not possible for every one; they are practicable only in the case of very prosperous industries, which can afford to sink large sums and to pay high wages. The rents at Port Sunlight and Bournville are much higher than could be paid by the bulk of workers in other businesses.

We admit most willingly that these generous and disinterested experiments are worthy of all

praise, and we should never think of throwing cold water on them; they represent a movement which deserves careful attention and which will make its way.* It is being directed by men of energy and conviction—men who are not to be frightened by obstacles and who are impelled by the faith that moves mountains. No one can say where they will stop.

But however far they may go, they must stop sooner or later. In the very nature of things, garden cities will always be something exceptional and isolated, available only for a very small section of mankind. Happy they who succeed in finding their way into them; but how many will there be in all? It is not to be imagined that all our great manufactories are going to follow suit. Nor is it to be supposed even that all those which do so will reap success as a consequence of the move. The industrial struggle of to-day is no idyll, and to win one's way in it, it is often necessary to make the best of very unpleasant and uninviting surroundings.

* A great French manufacturer, M. Schneider of Creusot, is about, it seems, to attempt something of the same kind. There are probably not two French firms that could venture on such a project as he contemplates: the creation of a garden city capable of holding 6000 workers at Champagne-sur-Seine, side by side with electricity works.

IV

But we have allowed M. Vandervelde to beguile us away too far from our subject. The question is not how to retain the workers in the factories, but how to lead back to the land those surplus hands that can find no employment in the cities.

Far from solving this problem, M. Vandervelde does but intensify it and make it more complex, for the advantages he proposes to extend to the artisans offer an additional temptation to lure away agricultural labourers from the soil.

He has left entirely on one side the principal factor in the question, and has only devoted his mind to the condition of the workman's home. He has not asked himself the preliminary question as to what will be the effects upon the workman himself of the scientific and economic revolution which is tending every day to decrease the numbers of hands employed in manufacturing. What is to be done with those who lose their occupation? Is it wise, is it democratic to ignore this grim eventuality and to make no kind of provision for it?

So much said by way of criticism, we must

nevertheless recognize that we can turn M. Vandervelde's second solution to good account by extending and modifying it, and can make of it an evolutionary stage between manufacturing and agriculture which is worth serious consideration, and which would solve our problem at least in some degree. From semi-agriculturist our artisan should be able to become, when the time arrives, an agriculturist pure and simple. While the system will tend to modify the hardships of unemployment in the cities at moments when, owing to over-production, the labour-market is slack, there are very few branches of industry which have not sometimes their dead season, and if at these times they keep all hands at work, it means that they accumulate stock to such a degree that prolonged periods of crisis ensue.

It is on this account that the law permits certain industries, specially dependent upon the seasons, to increase their working-hours when the demand for their goods is greatest, thus enabling them to decrease their working-hours at other times. In the case of these industries, and of many others to which the law does not extend the same privileges, a cessation of work for one day in the week is sometimes a real necessity as a measure of precaution. But how

is the interest of the workman to be reconciled with that of the work, how atone to him for docking him of a day's wages? Here is where M. Vandervelde's scheme comes in so well. Our artisan can put in the extra time working on his land. Presently he may find that the hours thus spent are more profitable than they would have been at the manufactory. In this way stoppages of work might become a regular thing under quite satisfactory conditions, and prove a veritable safety-valve to the manufacturing industry.

It may be objected that the system will not work because those manufacturers who cannot give their men its benefits will probably continue to work full time, while the semi-agriculturists are spending the slack time in the country, and the latter would in this way be at a disadvantage.

This would be so, if there were no means of restoring the equilibrium, but the means are at hand and well known. They consist of a method of redemption arranged between establishments which cannot afford to stop work, and those which are obliged to do so. In most cases the stoppage is foreseen and provided for satisfactorily in this way.

This semi-industrial, semi-agricultural evolution will come about gradually as soon as our

French industries shall have been steered in the right direction, and as soon as our workingmen recognize the need of it. They will regain their lost knowledge of agricultural lore simply by force of working in their own fields, and the love of the land will be reborn again in their hearts. This, together with the strong sentiment of personal ownership, will suffice to recreate the old rural spirit, and in time to give it predominance over the call of the city.

THE PRESENT CONDITION OF AGRICULTURE

CHAPTER IX

THE PRESENT CONDITION OF AGRICULTURE

I

M. VANDERVELDE pulls us up with another objection which looks formidable at first sight—the diminution of agricultural labour due to the introduction of machinery and the transformation of methods of culture. In agriculture, as in manufacture, he tells us, machinery is taking the place of man in an increasing degree. Every day marks some new progress in mechanism and a corresponding deduction from the demand for human hands; the methods of culture most approved are those which demand least manual labour. It is in these circumstances, he exclaims, that you would try to win back to the land the hapless artisans of the town!

The objection is not without weight, but it can be met easily enough. And first of all, there is a very great difference between the uses made of machinery in manufactures and in

agriculture. In manufactures the machine is everything—it replaces manual labour altogether. In agriculture, the part played by the machine, even the most highly perfected, is very different. It will be some time before we see machines capable of growing corn and potatoes, beetroot and grapes! Nature is exacting, and will always refuse to yield her treasures to man until he has expended efforts of brain and muscle for which no substitute can be found. This truth has been well expressed by M. Cheysson in the little book to which I have referred already. "The peasant," he says, "is at the mercy of the cycle of the seasons. He cannot improvise an oak, or a vine, or even a rose; and, forced alternately, like Maître Jacques, to harrow and sow and reap, he is immune from the sub-division of labour which has transformed our manufacturing industries. . . . It is thus that the earth defends its toilers against the dangers of over-crowding, which is one of the most baneful characteristics of our great cities."

Let us deal now with the other objection, that the methods of culture now most in vogue are those which require least manual labour. It is surprising that M. Vandervelde himself has not perceived that his reasoning rests upon

a begging of the whole question; if our agriculturists have forsaken their old methods of culture, this is due precisely to the rural exodus. They have forsaken their old methods regretfully, and would be only too pleased to return to their time-honoured system of rotations of crops, if they could secure sufficient labourers for the purpose.

During the agricultural crisis every one went in for meadow-lands and the rearing of cattle, but many agriculturists question now whether we did not go too far in this direction. Already we are forced to try to find markets for our best cattle abroad. This will help the foreigner to improve his stock, thus eventually enabling our customers to be independent of us. When that day comes, we shall be glad enough to fall back upon our former products. The trade in cereals, in which we excel, is not languishing now, to judge by what is happening at this moment in the United States, which were obliged to import foreign corn last year for their enormous population.

It is to be hoped, moreover, that our agriculture would develop in accordance with the needs of the market, which are infinitely elastic. Here, again, we come upon a fundamental difference between agriculture and manufacture. As we

have already remarked, when we are sufficiently supplied with clothes and furniture, we stop buying, and are not to be tempted even by low prices. Therefore it is folly to say to our manufacturers: "Keep on producing—no need to trouble about anything," instead of saying, "Be careful only to produce in accordance with the needs of the market. Otherwise you will be ruined."

It is quite different with our food supplies; there is no doubt that there is a far larger demand for them all over the world. If the artisan and even the agricultural labourer are better clothed and housed than they used to be, they are far from being so well fed. In the great cities, in which workmen require really good food to enable them to cope with the deleterious influences of their surroundings, the nourishment they have to make shift with is often very inadequate. The same can be said of certain country districts where poverty is endemic. What existence could be more miserable than that of the great families of Breton peasants and fisherfolk so often condemned to a state bordering on famine?

It should be accounted a duty to do for the food of the masses what has already been done for their clothing and their housing; hence the

necessity of fostering the great revival of agriculture, especially in the direction of small farms which also provide most scope for manual labour. When our workers, alike in town and country, have begun to eat more bread, and meat, and vegetables, and cheese, and fruit, the land will have to be cultivated more and more; no one can form any idea of the enormous quantity of products that can be absorbed by mankind.

II

Thus it is we read the future of industrious humanity; for the question which calls for consideration in France, calls for consideration a little everywhere, and everywhere the same conclusions are being arrived at, and the same methods put into practice.

This revival of agriculture is not to be accounted for entirely by economic reasons, by the necessity for opening out new channels of labour for the working-classes; it is due partly to a cause more profound, to the instinct of self-preservation which guides nations as well as individuals, and which gives them warning of impending dangers. Now, is there any greater danger for a country than for it to be

in the power of the foreigner, by being dependent upon the foreigner for its food supply? That is England's position now, and it is not an enviable one. It is a subject of constant and justifiable anxiety for that great country, so powerful otherwise; if England were ever engaged in a great war, any slight mishap, any surprise attack upon the seas, might cut off her supplies and starve her immense population. Without imagining the worst, it is at least certain that on the day England went to war, the price of provisions in England would rise to such an extent as would cause the Government internal embarrassment.*

There is a terrible unfathomed danger ahead of her, and it is very natural that the other

* The situation in England has been getting steadily worse in this respect for the last fifty years. The importation of cereals, which amounted to only 83,000,000 cwt. in 1871, had reached 196,000,000 in 1901; corn alone had risen to 69,000,000 cwt. from 39,000,000. The horned cattle imported in 1871 amounted to 248,000 head; in 1902 the figure had swollen to 495,000. The meat imports shows a far more remarkable increase, rising from 2½ to 20 million cwt. within the same period. Thus the abandonment of agriculture forces England, who twenty years ago was already spending £146,000,000 upon her food supply, to spend £214,000,000 to-day. Compare this state of affairs with that of France, who, to-day, pays nothing to the foreigner for provisions, and who in addition finds a market abroad for the surplus of her own food stuffs.

European powers should be anxious that no similar peril should threaten them.

For this reason it is that they are turning their attention towards agriculture, and encouraging it with subventions and all kinds of help. It has come to seem in their eyes an essential element of national defence, indispensable for the nourishment of the great isolated camp into which every nation is transformed in time of war. They remember, too, that the rural classes provide them with the best stuff for their armies, the sturdiest and steadiest, and that when this great reservoir of strength runs dry, the military status of the nation sinks accordingly.

These ideas are now beginning to make way in England also. The great economic revolution now being advocated by Mr. Chamberlain, with such power and such tenacity, is nothing but a movement back to the land—back to that agriculture which England has neglected so much for half a century. Of course, the great reformer does not proclaim this truth dogmatically, for fear of alarming the manufacturers and the orthodox economists; he does not propose to revive and reinstate English agriculture as it once was. He feels, doubtless, that this task would be too difficult—that it is now too late to attempt it.

He has conceived another idea—that of dividing up the great British Empire into two sections, devoted almost exclusively, the one to agriculture, the other to the manufacturing industries. With this as his starting-point, he speaks as follows to the great agricultural colonies, Canada, Australia, and the African possessions. "Take warning," he says to them, "from the lessons that have cost us so dear, and instead of applying your energies to the manufacturing industries which are now plethoric, devote them altogether to agriculture. Here you will have a fertile field all to yourselves, which will ensure you wealth and security. If you will do this, I promise you for your natural products the most magnificent market in the world—the British market, with its immense working-class population, representing an inexhaustible reservoir of consumers. In return for the provisions we shall buy from you, we shall send you our manufactures; the United Kingdom will be the workshop, you will be the harvest-field, the orchard; the balance will thus be restored between our supply and demand, and the British Empire will constitute a perfect model of the true division of labour and human activities."

This grandiose project is, in truth, far from

being perfect, and it will in its application knock up against innumerable difficulties,* but one cannot deny the rigour of its logic or the justice of the standpoint on which it rests. Mr. Chamberlain's chief merit will lie in his having recognized from afar the rocks upon which the English ship of state may founder, and in his having said out loud what others were content to think. He entertains no illusions as to what used to be proudly designated the industrial supremacy of England.

That which gives force to Mr. Chamberlain's movement is the promise he holds out of an enlarged British market in substitution for the foreign markets which British commerce has been losing. What a sense of satisfaction the

* The weak point in the system is easily discerned. It is based upon an illusion, the belief, that is, that the great British colonies—Canada, for instance—will come to a stop in their economic development and give up their industries, resigning themselves to dependence upon the mother-country for manufactured goods. It is very probable that they will do just the opposite, and, walled in behind their protective tariffs, develop their national industries better than ever. There are signs of this already. A group of Canadian manufacturers have just formed themselves into a syndicate for establishing a tinware manufactory, and, in order to compete successfully with Wales, which hitherto has supplied Canada with tinware, they have petitioned their Government for a protective duty, and have been promised it. This will administer a mortal blow to the tinware industry in Wales.

Britisher would have in boasting, "Henceforward, we also are self-sufficing, and can do without any one else. We have an empire vast enough to supply the customers we need, and our workmen need have no fear in future of being unemployed. There are more than enough English consumers in the world to absorb all our national output."

The English agriculturists, for their part, so long neglected and despised, have begun to hope that they also will share in the great return to agricultural production, and that, thanks to better prices, they will be able to resume branches of cultivation which they have had to forsake; they are saying to themselves that the manual labour they require may now be forthcoming, and that workmen will be only too glad to seek in the country an existence less wretched than has been their lot in the towns.

If we turn our eyes now towards Germany, we shall see that here, also, despite the industrial fever which she has been going through during the last twenty years, there is a strong movement in progress towards the land. There are superficial observers who make light of the movement, and declare that it is the outcome merely of a coalition of great landlords anxious to raise the value of their estates. But if that

were so, the German agrarian league would not be so formidable, and we should be at a loss to understand its enormous influence over public opinion and with the authorities. This influence is to be explained only by the existence of a subterranean current carrying the idea into the lowest strata of the population. The Germans are a practical race, like the English, and the immense industrial triumphs they have achieved during the last thirty years have not turned their heads to such a degree as to have made them lose touch with reality. They have been warned by unmistakable symptoms that they have reached the zenith of their industrial prosperity, as Great Britain reached hers long ago, and they are beginning to have a care for the future.

After an era of unequalled prosperity, which lasted until 1901, they found themselves thrown by the excess of their output into a crisis which very nearly ended in a veritable catastrophe. They recovered from this by reason of their energy and discipline, and because the industries which were in danger did not try to get the better of each other, as happens at such times in other countries; on the contrary, they stood by each other, and came to mutual understandings, with a view to saving the situation and to

finding outlets for their surplus production abroad.

The immediate peril has passed, but there is a general impression that it may recur, and that, sooner or later, Germany may find herself in the same situation as Great Britain—that she is destined to see her foreign markets narrowed, whilst her production continues to grow; and she cannot, like Great Britain, find fresh markets in her colonies, for her policy has been to have as few as possible, and to content herself with exploiting those of other nations.

What, then, will she do with her enormous industrial population? There is always the resource of emigration, and already there is an unceasing stream of emigrants from Germany which serve as a safety-valve. But emigration has its undesirable side as a remedy, and all the great European nations, which hitherto have regarded it with so much approval, should begin soon to realize that it is all to the advantage of the country into which it flows. It is the emigrants from Great Britain, and Germany, and Italy, who have made the United States, as they are now making Brazil, and Mexico, and the Argentine Republic. It is they who have enabled the budding industries of those

lands to enter into competition with the industries of the countries they quitted. So it must always be.

The great tide of emigration, however, towards the New World is beginning to weaken, and these regions will not suffice permanently for the surplus populations of Europe,* for the simple reason that there are limits to space and the best places are getting filled. From the force of circumstances, therefore, Germany is being impelled into this return to agriculture. The German Government, which has done so much for manufacturers, realizes that it has gone too far in this direction, and must "back" a little. The new treaties of commerce which it has just negotiated with the principal European nations, are a triumph for agriculture and for the agrarian party; their distinguishing mark is the increase in the import duty upon corn, and upon the chief agricultural products.

In the first discussions of this matter in the Reichstag, the German Government defined its position quite distinctly, and announced that it

* The Austrian Consul-General in New York records that, in spite of the great reduction in the rates of passage, the number of European immigrants into the States sank from 568,000 in 1903, between April 1 and July 29, to 427,000 in 1904 within the same period; while the number of European emigrants returning home from America increases every year.

deliberately proposed to favour agriculture. The Minister of Finance, Baron de Richthoffer, recalled to the House the fact that the Chambers of Agriculture had come unanimously to the conclusion that agriculture must be protected by import duties in the interest of the small farmers. He pointed out that while trade and industry had developed of recent years, the number of agricultural labourers had decreased by 400,000 in a single decade. The object, then, of the new custom-house policy of Germany, is simply the furtherance of the movement back to the land.

What we have said of Germany may be said also of Italy. Italy has achieved a wonderful industrial development during the last few years, but she is not blind to the future, and she recognizes the difficulty she will have presently in finding customers for her output, if she does not put a curb on production. Accordingly, she has been devoting herself whole-heartedly to the development of her agriculture. She is seeking to become the garden of Europe, and no nation has organized its exports of agricultural produce with so much care and acumen. In this respect we should do well to take her for our model.*

* The Italian Office of Statistics has published a study of

It is due to Italian statesmen, most of whom are excellent men of business, to record that they never lose sight of the needs of rural Italy, and that they are making continuous efforts to make the most of it. Their efforts are powerfully seconded by King Victor Emanuel III., who has shown himself from the first a fervent believer in agriculture. He has recently given very striking proof of his sentiments by initiating a very excellent measure—the creation of an international institute for the study of matters of interest to agriculturists. It is too soon to predict what will be the outcome of this new institution, but there can be no doubt of its extreme value to agriculturists. It will be a meeting-place for the agrarian parties of all nations, and in particular for that of Italy, which counts among its numbers so many men of great worth.

The lack of equilibrium between manufactures and agriculture is an evil, it should be noted, peculiar so far to Europe. The New World does not yet suffer from this malady,

the progress of agriculture in the country during the years 1883–1903. The average annual output of large produce (cereals, wine, potatoes, wood, cattle, etc.) during these twenty years was 4,910,000,000 liras; while fruit, vegetables, fowls, eggs, and flowers amounted to 150,000,000 more.

and if it takes warning from our example, it may escape it altogether. Agriculture is still the great industry of Canada, Mexico, Brazil, and the Argentine Republic—countries comprising immense expanses of rich land. Their manufactures have, as yet, plenty of margin, and are not in danger of producing more than is wanted.

The United States, at first sight, seem in even greater danger than the European nations, so greatly does their industrial production exceed their own demands, and they do things with such a rush that it seems impossible for them to pull up short. But if we look a little more closely into their condition, we are soon reassured as far as they are concerned; they may succeed in ruining all the rest of the world, they can never ruin themselves, because they can always fall back upon agriculture, which they have been careful, unlike Great Britain, not to sacrifice to manufactures. They have had the wisdom to keep the two forms of industry abreast and to neglect neither. Hence theirs is now, with France and Russia, one of the three countries capable of adapting themselves to present circumstances, and of weathering the economic revolution which menaces all the others.

This extraordinary energy could not have been better guided than it has been. Their greatest efforts have been to turn their soil to account and develop their agriculture, in the consciousness that therein lay the inexhaustible source of their wealth and the solid buttress of their well-being.

Their progress was so extraordinarily rapid that it really seemed as though they would overwhelm the whole world with their produce, but Europe took fright, and raised a custom-house barrier which served to stem the tide of invasion.

The Americans saw the situation at once, and raised no objections. Instead, with the rapidity of thought and deed which characterize them, they changed their weapon and, allowing their agricultural ambitions to lie dormant for a while, they threw themselves into the manufacturing industry. We have already told how in less than a quarter of a century the United States, from being dependent upon Europe for manufactured goods, first became self-sufficing in this field, and then became one of the most powerful and formidable exporters; its commercial balance being actually higher than that of any other nation.

At the present moment it looks as though

nothing could stop their progress. They are rushing through space like a cannon-ball. Their industrial ambitions are beginning to arouse everywhere the same kind of alarm as was evoked formerly by their agriculture, and there seems little doubt that an era of difficulties will begin for them.

Their ingenious method of overcoming the custom-house barrier raised against them by protectionist countries, their trust system, is beginning to fail of its purpose; Germany has retaliated with *cartels*, which are nothing but anti-trusts; Canada, at once more logical and more courageous, has opposed them with differential duties corresponding to the advantages enjoyed by the trusts, and it is to be foreseen that the other countries will have recourse to similar methods in self-protection. The Yankees, with their keen scent, have become aware of the storm threatening them from the European side, and by way of preparation for it have descended upon Asia, where they have already taken root, and where they hope to find an immense market so soon as the Panama Canal shall have made communication possible with all parts of the great Republic.

But here they are going to knock up against

Great Britain, Germany, and, above all, Japan, whom now nothing will check in that expansion which the United States themselves viewed with so much favour. What will come of this conflict of insatiable ambitions? Shall we in the midst of our civilization see this struggle for commercial supremacy degenerate into a sanguinary war? Though it may seem unlikely, it is not impossible.

Meanwhile, the possibilities of agriculture in the States are infinite—we are only at the beginning of their development. Their production of corn, for instance, concentrated to-day in the north-west, can be extended without measure towards the south-west, the States of Arkansas, Oklahama, and Texas, where there are still 130 millions of acres available for cultivation. There is Nebraska, too, which is marvellously fertile.

The day approaches when the United States will reap the recompense of the efforts and the sacrifices they have made for the maintenance of their agricultural strength. They will be able to brave the tempest which threatens their manufactures, that coalition against them of all the other nations. They have but to hark back to agriculture—a less fruitful industry but more safe and more lasting. They can, in

consequence, face the future with more serenity than any other country, provided only they are not intoxicated by success and do not want to dominate the world. Imperialism would be just as dangerous for them as it is for Great Britain, or the Pan-Germanic movement is for Germany.

THE COLONIES.
AGRARIAN SOCIALISM

CHAPTER X

THE COLONIES. AGRARIAN SOCIALISM

I

AFTER the United States, France certainly takes the first place among the great industrial nations in regard to her economic resources and the balance struck between agriculture and manufacture. Like the United States, she is able, whenever she likes, whenever she feels the need, to foster agriculture by moderating a little her industrial activity. She has at hand everything she can need for that—a most fertile soil and a climate adaptable to every variety of growth; she can be at will a field or a garden; she can transform or multiply all her agricultural products in accordance with the demand from within or from without.

At first sight it may seem that she is at a disadvantage as compared with the United States or Canada, in that her soil is fully occupied and has been tilled for centuries; but

although she undoubtedly lacks the endless virgin prairies of the New World, she has many regions still lying uncultivated, *landes* and poor grazing grounds, to the extent of many millions of acres, the greater part of which might still be turned to account. As a matter of fact, some small section is reclaimed every year, though not more than enough to balance those other bits of land, far from the centres of population, which are annually re-afforested because their owners can find no occupants for them, and can devote them to no more profitable use.

The return to the land will have the effect of gradually driving back the army of foreign labourers which has been invading the country in ever-growing numbers for the last twenty years, and which swarms annually over the *départements* du Nord, Centre, and Midi, in response to the regular demand for manual labour. Without them, as things stand, certain branches of our agriculture would come to an end, and they prevented our agricultural crisis from ending in disaster.

This question of the foreign labourers has been thoroughly gone into and examined for the *département* of Seine-et-Marne, by two distinguished experts, M. Jules Bénard and M.

Brandin, both of them members of the National Society of Agriculture. Both of them instituted a minute inquiry into the subject, the former in the district of Meaux, the latter in that of Melun.

These investigations followed upon a great inquiry instituted by the Belgian Government, which established the fact that more than 45,000 Belgians were employed on agricultural work in France, either permanently or temporarily. Besides the Belgians, we have labourers from Germany and Italy, and elsewhere. In the Meaux district alone, M. Bénard found that more than 4000 foreigners were employed temporarily every year. In the Melun district, according to M. Brandin's estimate, about 2500 Belgians and Swiss find occupation—about 1200 all the year round; the rest for six months in the year.

On the day when French workmen decide to take the place of these foreigners, a long step will be taken towards ameliorating the condition of our labour-market, and settling the question of the unemployed.

If it be objected that, generally speaking, the labour in question is intermittent and supplementary and inadequate as a livelihood, we may reply that this is not less the case for the foreigners who undertake it, and that they

have other occupations at home, such as our own people might also find for themselves. Most of them, as a matter of fact, have small holdings in their own country which help to keep their families, thus realizing the ideal we dream of for the French labourer—the life of a peasant-farmer, getting all he can out of his own land, and adding to his income by working also for others.

There is, therefore, no doubt, whatever may be said to the contrary, that there are great openings for labour in our agricultural regions —openings that our French labourers can avail themselves of whenever they please, whenever, that means to say, they come to realize the advantages of life in the country.

Moreover, it should be very easy to extend very widely the field of activities for French agricultural labourers by developing those branches of agriculture which would give them most occupation, such as cereals, dairy produce, cheese, vegetables, fruit, and flowers. There is no reason why France should not become a great market-garden; her produce would be in request all over the world, if only she knew how to deal with her *clientèle.*

II

But as we have said, the evolution to be accomplished should go beyond the agricultural labourer; for the return to the land to be realized thoroughly and adequately, the movement should embrace a portion also of the *bourgeoisie* and those small traders who are in so unhappy a condition, and who have such a blue look-out for the future.

There are any number of large landowners who would be only too happy to get rid of part of their properties in small allotments; if they are not cutting up their properties now, it is simply because they cannot find buyers even at the very lowest prices.

But we are not restricted now to our own land of France. We also, like Great Britain and the United States, have immense expanses waiting to be exploited. Thanks to the wisdom and foresight of Jules Ferry and others of our statesmen, we have at our disposal a vast empire extending the world over, and comprising every variety of agricultural produce that can be imagined.

Until now we have done little more than explore this new world, which at first was a

matter of wonder to us, and almost of alarm. Now that we are beginning to know it better, we regard it more confidently. Confidence will soon pass to enthusiasm, and we shall be able to take in the wonderful perspectives of the future opening out before us.

Then, at last, the youth of the country will turn its eyes towards this promised land which calls them to a larger life—a life exacting more intellect and energy, and offering greater profits and rewards, and the dull daily round of the existence of to-day will seem wretched by comparison. The true French character, instinct with courage and daring initiative, will reawaken from its long slumber, and shake off the dull routine that has been masking the genius of our race.

For experience has spoken, and has given striking proofs that the Frenchman is an excellent colonist, provided he is left a little to himself and not hampered by officialdom; not only is he full of initiative, he shows himself also very practical and resourceful, adapting himself to his surroundings and making them part of himself. In France he is unrecognizable, because he is under an extinguisher; abroad he is a different man.

When he decides to go to the colonies, he will

turn them into a new and prosperous France. But how are we to get him to make up his mind to go; how are we to overcome his apathy, his blind devotion to his corner-seat by the family fireside; how, above all, are we to reason with that deplorable attitude of so many fathers and mothers, who imagine that the end of the world has come when they see their son embark upon the steamer?

Assuredly, the revolution will not be accomplished in a day. The settled habits and customs of a race are not to be changed in a moment. However, the change will come about more speedily, I think, than is generally imagined.

III

To make the coming generation see things in this light, all we have to do is to change our methods of educating them. We have sedentaries enough, we want men of action now. Let us train our young for the battle of life, and equip them with modern arms. Let us try to give to the mass of Frenchmen, rich or poor, some knowledge of foreign languages: it is the best implement we can place in their hands. With that acquisition, a man cannot starve. Let

us add to that a thorough study of geography—geography made attractive as it is by modern methods. Let us give them instead of empty novels, too often corrupt, records of those voyages and travels which call out a man's noblest aspirations and appeal to his highest qualities.

Thus shall we give a new character to a section of our French youth, freeing it from the atmosphere in which it has been sickly and emasculate. Large views will begin to be held, we shall grow less envious and petty. Thus the new colonial spirit will have an ameliorating effect upon political and social habits. The colonies will serve as a safety-valve for those ardent and generous natures that grow embittered in the narrowness of our present existence, because they have no opening for their energies, and our society is to them like a mouldy dungeon.

The transplanting of Frenchmen in the colonies will have many other advantages which must be placed to its credit. We were deploring a while ago the falling off in the French birth-rate—a matter for so much real anxiety; while all the other nations grow and multiply, we remain stationary and allow the "big battalions" all around us to wax bigger

and bigger. If we continue to remain stationary in this way, we run the risk of becoming an easy prey for neighbours who may be tempted to aggrandize themselves at our expense. It may be said that this is an improbable hypothesis, but it were wise to be on our guard.

How are we to cope with this danger, how make Frenchmen realize the all-importance of larger families? To answer this question we must ask another, and inquire why it is at present they are so little prolific? Now, there is no doubt that the chief reason is the Frenchman's excessive regard for his offspring, his anxiety for its welfare, and his fears lest it should not be adequately provided for.

Provident and economical, the Frenchman looks ahead, calculating what provision he can make for his children and considering what opening he can find for them. The more crowded the professions become, the more difficult it grows to earn a livelihood, the more nervous he becomes. The advent of each child grows to be a source of trouble and anxiety instead of joy. The result is that he refrains from having many children.

How different would be his whole attitude if he could say to himself, "The world is wide, and there is room for every one with brain and

muscle—that in our colonies there will always be a sure refuge for Frenchmen in need of one, and posts better than any that could be hoped for here at home." The day when this notion will have penetrated into the heads of our people, they will cease to regard children as such serious burdens and will adopt the view of the small farmer, who is dependent on his family for manual labour, and welcomes each new child as a gift from God.

The example our colonies have set us in this matter already should fire us with the spirit of emulation. It is a well-known fact that the French race becomes very prolific as soon as it is transplanted in new countries, where it feels that it has breathing-space. Have we not seen in Canada a race of three million Frenchmen spring from a root of only sixty thousand?

In Algeria and Tunis, in the same way, the birth-rate, which in France is 29 per 1000, rises to as much as 36 per 1000—as high as in Germany, higher than in England. It is noteworthy, too, that in France the largest families are to be found in those parts which send out most emigrants—Brittany, for instance, and the Basque country, where the births but fill the gaps caused by the emigration.

But if these aspirations are to bear fruit, we

must see to it that we turn our colonies to the fullest account, so organizing the administration of them as to ensure our colonists openings that shall prove both lucrative and durable. We have seen too many colonists return to France downcast and disillusioned, and more penniless than when they started. Their own fault, it may be said; they went out under unfavourable conditions, without making any preparations, without any special qualifications and without capital. Possibly, but that is just what must be prevented in future, and the way to prevent it is simply to organize our colonization instead of leaving it to chance. We ought long ago to have established powerful colonizing agencies for this purpose.

IV

The Government should take in hand itself the establishment of these agencies. It has a thousand and one means at its disposal for turning capital into the direction of the colonies, and this would be good business, as well as a patriotic proceeding: let the Government regard it as their duty, dictated by the urgent needs of our splendid colonies, whose very existence and

entire future is at stake. How are we to explain the fact that Algeria attracts so few Frenchmen, while it exercises so powerful a fascination upon foreigners?

M. Jonnart, who knows Algeria through and through and has the colony's interests at heart, looks forward with anxiety to the future; he notes the alarming fact that while the solid mass of the native population remains unchanged and unchangeable, the foreign flood is swelling steadily and the French element makes little or no advance; and he fears the advent of a day when we shall be submerged, and France shall lose the precious possession it took her a century to win.

However, he has set himself to the task of rendering such an eventuality impossible, setting about it in a thoroughly practical spirit and with an apostolic zeal which tends to inspire universal confidence. He realizes that speeches and lectures and fair promises are not enough to induce large masses of his countrymen to cross the Mediterranean and seek their fortune in Algeria. To induce them to do so, they must be offered some sort of guarantee of success. To this end our Governor-General has drawn up a complete plan of colonization, carefully thought out, and available for study by any one

who cares to examine it in detail. It has been published under the title of the "Colonization of Algeria." From its pages you may learn where you had better pitch your tent or build your house. It supplies the most detailed information as to the locality of the principal centres, their climate, height above the level of the sea, the number and extent of the available grants of land, free or purchaseable, as to the kind of produce that can be carried on and as to the plant or implements required for them, as to the trades which thrive there, as to the population, methods of transport, etc., etc. Every centre has its special chart, from which an idea can be got of the topography of the region. Finally, it announces that lands conceded to new colonists are exempt from taxation for ten years, that departmental agricultural experts will be at hand to give them useful hints and information, and that on arriving they may obtain help and advice from the adminstration of the commune. This is one of the best provisions of all. The paternal guardianship to be exercised by the administration will do more to reassure them than all the rest.

M. Jonnart is at pains, moreover, to save them from injurious delusions and to warn them of the conditions essential to success. He

insists upon the need of a practical acquaintance with agriculture and of the possession of some small means—5000 francs at least. He advises would-be colonists to begin by educating themselves for their new career by taking service for the first twelve months with some one already settled in the colony on a large scale, so as to familiarize themselves with the methods in vogue.

In this way it is that M. Jonnart justifies by chapter and verse the assertion he places at the beginning of his book, and which sums up its contents: "Algeria," he says, "offers special advantages to our home agriculturists, at a loss for adequate holdings. For the same price, and without extra trouble, they can secure in Algeria much larger properties, destined in all probability to become gradually more valuable and bringing in, if competently managed, larger revenues."

V

We feel justified now in affirming, after this long and careful inquiry into the facts, that the return to the land is in accordance with the nature of things, and in the interest of all classes of the community, and also of the

Government, for its tendency is to maintain the equilibrium of the country, both socially and politically; it serves to protect us from the troubles which result from the too exclusive development of manufacture.

There is, however, another obstacle in its way, a new obstacle to which a passing reference has been already made, but to which we must now return — I refer to the movement of Agrarian Socialism, which has assumed such serious proportions of late, and has begun to alarm all those whose business it is to look ahead.

We are obliged to admit that the apprehensions aroused are not without ground, and that this movement, which has now been in progress in France for some years, would be calculated to frustrate all efforts to bring capital and labour back to the land, if it were to maintain its present advance.

There is no doubt that under the influence of the revolutionary party a subterranean work is now in progress which tends to undermine the rights of property and to lead the rural masses, without their suspecting it, towards the substitution of collective property for private property. The leaders of the party, who for a long time had restricted their energies to the

towns, where they found a soil better fitted for their purpose and an army easier to mobilize, have at last realized that all their efforts shattered themselves against the wall of granite presented by the democracy of the country districts, lovers of order more than of liberty. This fact once noted, they began at once to lay siege, with rare patience and cunning strategy, to this rural stronghold. Their plan, now well known, has been to seize hold of the peasant by his strongest feelings, and to make use of his love for the land to turn him against the present order of things. These new-style Socialists profess to have the greatest respect for property, more respect than the State, which apportions the soil among a certain number of privileged individuals instead of bestowing it generously upon all those who have arms to labour upon it and turn it to account; they declare that it is not enough to make property accessible to all—that it must belong to all—that every Frenchman who so wishes may own his share of the land.

Starting from this point, he has a different tale to tell and different promises to hold out to each of the various classes of agriculturists. To the farmer, he exclaims: "Is it not iniquitous that you should sweat and toil for the benefit

of a landlord who merely condescends to be born so as to enjoy the right of living upon you and spending the fruits of your labour upon his luxurious comforts and idle pleasures?" What is the soil in itself?—nothing, absolutely nothing, until man's labour turns it to account. Labour, then, is everything, and alone has a right to reward. The rights of property, if such there be, belong to him who tills the soil, and the triumph of Socialism will mean nothing else than the triumph of the farmer placed by law in possession of the land.

After the farmer, the *métayer*. Here he is on more difficult ground, and it was long believed that this essentially democratic institution would victoriously withstand the assaults of the revolutionary propaganda; it is, in fact, based upon an intimate co-operation of capital and labour, on that very participation of labour in the profits of capital which the Socialists themselves used to put forward as the most practical solution of the social problem. Despite the anathemas heaped upon *métayage* by certain economists, this system has worked out as one of the best methods of reconciling all interests. Its success during the agricultural crisis was so great that the majority of foreign nations now consider it as a model to be imitated.

Its merits, however, are now being questioned by the Collectivist propagandists, who are tackling the *métayers* even more strenuously than they tackled the farmers. In order to get hold of him they make use of an argument which is easily enough grasped by simple minds with but a rudimentary notion of logic; they go first for the old-established *métayers*, who have been at work on their particular holding, fathers and sons, for generations back, and they say: How can you be content to be merely a profit-sharer in a work which is in reality your own, no one's but yours? This soil which you cultivate is what you and your ancestors have made it; you have put your brain and muscle into it, and it is to you alone it should belong. As for your landlord, he and his have been paid for their interest in the land long since, and you owe him nothing more; we shall be giving you no more than your just rights when we put you in his place, when the day of revolution arrives, and if you wish it that day may be to-morrow.

A conquest even more difficult than that of the *métayer* is that of these small landowners, who have always been regarded as the strongest rampart of the rights of property, and who have always been steadfastly opposed to revolutionary doctrines; they cling passionately to

their small slips of territory, and they have always held the Socialists in horror. The latter, however, have not been afraid to storm this strong barricade. As the small landowner has generally farmed his own land, there is not much difficulty in making him accept the principle that the soil belongs to him who cultivates it. This principle advanced successfully, they proceed to demonstrate its logical consequences in a way that dazzles and fascinates their victim's envious eyes: they point to the beautiful vast domains stretching out their opulence all round him, and furnishing forth luxury for the rich landlords residing in the cities. As these idlers will not cultivate their lands themselves, let them cede them to men who could and would.

The voice of the serpent evokes feelings of envy, and a number of men who would never dream of abstracting a sou from their neighbour's pocket, find themselves turning their eyes greedily towards the prey marked down for them, and already capturing it in thought.

Thus it is that Agrarian Socialism is being surreptitiously introduced into our rural districts, and what is most noteworthy in the matter is the fact that it began in the strata which seemed most calculated to offer it most resistance. The agricultural labourers have been

left on one side contemptuously. These tactics are cleverer than they may seem. The Socialist leaders know that when they have carried the strong positions, they will have no difficulty with the rest. The workmen will fall readily enough into their hands.

For this they had only to await the right occasion, which was sure to come in time. The crisis in the vine-culture supplied it. The bad season in the Midi plunged the unfortunate cultivators into such distress that many of them had to reduce the amount of labour they employed, or else the price paid for it. They did not do this willingly but under the stress of absolute necessity.

This was the moment chosen by the revolutionaries of l'Hérault, l'Aude and other *départements* to launch out, and they seized it with an ardour easy to comprehend; on the word of command, issued by the Labour Bureau at Montpellier, all the agricultural labourers in those regions in which discontent had become accentuated were at once enrolled and organized for the fight. They were provided with leaders from outside, unconcerned with their interests, more eager for a struggle than for a settlement, and these had formulated claims on their behalf which were of a prohibitive character. Not

content with stipulating for the re-establishment of their old wages, an increase was demanded, accompanied by threats of pillage against those who should refuse to come to terms. Simultaneously, the workers' eyes were dazzled with promises of such a division of the land as would end all their troubles.

The proprietors, half ruined by the crisis, being unable to submit to such conditions, the revolutionary party set about terrorizing them, which was easy enough. The labourers were organized into flying columns, as it were, moving about from one commune to another, sowing terror wherever they went, and calling up visions of a new Jacquerie. Needless to say, the really good labourers who were tempted to resist, realizing the wrong that was being done them, were the first to be set upon and maltreated.

That is what we have come to in France to-day, and this outline sketch serves to show what progress Agrarian Socialism has made here during the few years that have elapsed since the advent to power of the revolutionary party; it is the all-powerful influence of this party that, by according impunity to the agents of disorder, and by making the organizers of strikes collaborators with the Government,

have rendered powerless the defenders of the law.

There can be little doubt that if such a state of things were to exist for long, the consequences would be disastrous.

To begin with, it would be a new cause of ruin, and ruin irreparable, for agriculture; the day when the rights of property are seriously shaken, every one will fight shy of it. The security, which was its chief attraction, having gone from it, no one will want to have anything more to do with it. And this will be only natural, for there are no investments more risky than those ventured in the soil. The land is a devouring abyss for capital, and every one except the Socialists realizes the fact; if we could add up all the sums that have been swallowed up in French soil in the effort to make of it what it now is—all the endless cost of reclaiming and improving and developing—we should be astonished by the immensity of the figure, and if we compared it with the revenue now drawn by the landowners of to-day, we should be obliged to admit that there is no form of property so unremunerative, or the right to which is so well-founded.

Yet this it is that the revolutionary party wishes to give away for nothing to the cultivators

of the soil. It will be sheer confiscation, pure and simple, that is clearly understood: neither the word nor the thing gives our reformers any cause for alarm. But have they considered what will ensue on the morrow of this great liquidation? Have they asked themselves what will happen when the new proprietors want to dispose of the wealth of acres in their possession? The time will inevitably come when they will ask themselves what their land is worth. A little reflection will tell them that they are not proprietors in any real sense of the word, but only occupants on a precarious tenure at the will and under the direction of the State.

They will be forced to look forward to a day when they will be unable to go on cultivating their land, and when it will pass back to the State out of their hands; ill-health or other causes may lead to this. After their death, the uncertainty will become worse still; if they leave no children, all is over and done with, and the fruits of all their labour will fall into the great universal reservoir and pass into alien hands.

In such a situation it is easy enough to foresee the line that will be taken by the collectivist landowner. He will live from

day to day in hand-to-mouth fashion, much like primitive man, doing what he must for his own personal needs and profits, but abstaining from improvements which do not yield immediate results.

The obvious outcome of it all will be a speedily increasing impoverishment of the soil, the decrease of capital invested in agriculture, and a return to pastoral conditions with their attendant poverty and distress. So much for the country. But will the individual be any better off, any more satisfied with his lot? Shall we see the birth of an enthusiasm for the land, a rush for its possession? If this were to be hoped for, there would be some kind of consolation in the thought, but we are absolutely convinced that the eviction of the old proprietors will be the signal for a general stampede of the agricultural population.

Doubtless, if the holdings were handed over without restriction, once and for all, to destitute members of the proletariat, thus making them as much *bonâ fide* proprietors as are the actual owners, applicants would not be wanting, and all hands would be stretched out towards the governmental providence which thus caused heavenly manna to fall down from the skies upon its chosen ones. There would be difficulty,

it is true, in satisfying everybody, and those whom it would be necessary to eliminate would soon develop into an army of malcontents, who, in their turn, would set to work at overturning the new order of things. A fresh revolution would be clamoured for, and would soon have to be forthcoming. A reassuring prospect!

But, as a matter of fact, the Collectivist State would not propose to carry their generosity so far; it would propose to reserve entire control over the so-called proprietors of its own making. In short, as I have said already, they would not be in any real sense proprietors at all; they would not be able to sell or let their land—it is doubtful even whether they could bequeath it to their children.

Under such conditions one asks one's self what temptations there will be in this hybrid system for the would-be agriculturist. Frenchmen are said to be volatile, which is doubtless a calumny; but if they are not volatile, at least they love their liberty and are not easily induced to forego it. Now, what the Collectivists have to offer the French agriculturist is nothing less than a disguised form of servitude: he would become at once the slave of the soil and of the Government. Once he has accepted this

gift from the State, he will be bound to his holding and unable to relinquish it until his master consents to allot him another. He will be condemned all his life to go round and round in the same circle, from which there will be no egress; his land, which he cannot sell or let or give away, will become to him a veritable shirt of Nessus which he is forbidden to take off.

Such is the solution put forward by our Collectivists for our problem, such the groundwork upon which they propose to establish the happiness of mankind. If the application of it were not so costly and were not putting back the clock of real progress more than half a century, we should be almost tempted to wish to see the experiment actually made. It would not be of long duration, if we may judge by what we know of the French workman's mind. We have before our eyes an institution which offers a very suggestive comparison—that of the workmen's cottages. This, when its methods are fully understood, is destined to transform the artisan's existence and to secure his well-being in the bosom of his family; in the earlier stages of the organization, the artisan only became owner of his house when he had paid as rent a sum equivalent to the interest upon

the capital represented; until then he was not free to sell it.

This restriction evoked the artisan's distrust and frightened him away. He saw in it the veiled intention of tying him down to his work and of preventing him from changing his residence, or even his method of livelihood, at will; he could not get over the fact that he could not sell, and the success of the enterprise seemed seriously endangered.

In order to overcome this feeling, the wise philanthropists who had the matter in hand did not hesitate to modify their regulations upon this essential point; they proposed to give the workman title-deeds to his house which he could cede, if he wished, to another, on condition that the latter should continue to pay the stipulated rent until the interest on the capital had been defrayed.

If the workman clings thus to his independence, if they will only consent to become proprietors subject to possessing the right to sell in the case of a house which is given them for next to nothing, who will believe that the peasant proprietor will be less tenacious and exacting? The poor specimens who would accept the grant of land offered them upon such a tenure as is contemplated would not be genuine agriculturists.

It is all-important that our rural classes should have their eyes opened to the real value of the Collectivists' promises. The best way to achieve this is by forcing these gentlemen to explain clearly how their doctrines are to be applied. We must not let them take refuge in vague formulas, and fine-sounding rhetorical generalizations—we must make them show us the works of their reforming machine and set them going for us so that we can study them in their smallest details. Thus pressed, they will show themselves in their true light, and their dupes will see through their game.

It is impossible that the three million proprietors who represent half our agricultural population would not then see already the danger that is threatening them, and would not rise as one man to bar the road against the false prophets who would lead them astray. They will see that on the day when the revolutionary party triumphed, their rights to their property would go. It would be the same for all, big and little. When the large properties had been confiscated, it would be very ingenuous to suppose that the small ones would be immune. Even if the State wished to leave them alone, it could not; those who had not had their share of loot, and who would always

be the greater number, would know how to force it to evict a new batch of owners and to give them their places at the banquet. Let the small proprietors reflect well over it all. Their very existence is at stake.

But in order to cope successfully with Socialism, as I have said, it is not enough to expose its fallacies and dangers; we must, at the same time, disarm the enemies of Society by planning out measures calculated to ameliorate the condition of our poor and to solve the problem set before us.

In the chapter on "State Aid" we have set forth some of the principal measures that are called for, but the most important of all, that which is really essential, is the establishment all over the country of the *Bien de Famille*, which will solve the problem of property in a way which will be at once the most liberal and the most practical. There is no better method of combating the Collectivists' schemes than by confronting collective property with personal property and making personal property accessible to all.

When this principle has received the sanction of the Government, it will be the duty of all interested in agriculture to help to put it into practice. It will not do to rely solely upon the

readiness of the labourer to fall in with it; he must be educated up to it and helped to profit by it. This should be the work of the syndicates, the natural supports of the agricultural world. It will be for them to create associations, after the fashion of those already in existence for the construction of artisans' dwellings, which will enable the would-be proprietors to make all the necessary arrangements that are involved.

The syndicates undertaking this could achieve another service to the cause of progress, which would contribute in large measure to the social well-being, by enlisting the workers in agricultural associations of another order, which would be empowered to serve as arbiters in cases of dispute.

There is yet one other thing to be done in the interests of the land.

We have spoken already of the harm that has been done by the absenteeism of the *bourgeois* landowners. As long as personal relations existed between the landowners, the farmers and the labourers, as long as they lived the same life, and met sometimes at table, and had opportunities of discussing their affairs amicably together, they all worked together for their common good in "happy family" fashion.

But when the *bourgeois* moved away, often leaving behind him as his representative a hard and tactless agent, seldom returning himself, unless to shut himself up in his villa or *château*, and condescending to take no interest in his neighbours and their affairs, a great change came about. The peasant began to look upon him askance. Then it was that the revolutionary party found its opportunity of beginning its propaganda. There were social gatherings at which their emissaries hob-nobbed with their guileless dupes and, exploiting for all it was worth the haughty indifference of the absentee landlord, succeeded in winning innumerable converts to their ideas. And gradually the *bourgeoisie*, through its own fault, lost all its influence and popularity.

Why did it not follow the example of the English aristocracy, which, by dint of energy, generosity, and civic devotion, has maintained its influence over the British democracy? The peers in England make good their title to all the great privileges they still enjoy by their public spirit and the practical part they take in the affairs of the country; they remain in such close touch with the working-classes that they have retained their position of authority in the eyes of the nation, and their

antecedents are forgotten in gratitude for their good deeds.

It is still possible for the French *bourgeoisie* to play a similar part in our national life. It has but to free itself from the spell of cities and to seek to love and understand the country once again. It has but to take the first step for its enemies of to-day to become its friends of to-morrow.

VI

We may now sum up, and we hope the reader will sum up with us. We firmly believe that this last cloud which we have observed upon the horizon of the world of agriculture, and which threatened to burst into a storm, ravaging everything and destroying all hopes for the future, will pass away like the others, and that the cultivation of the soil of France will be carried on beneath a radiant sky. The spirit of the French peasant contains treasures of good sense and right thinking, which will strengthen it against the sophisms of the revolutionary school and save it from the perilous adventures into which Socialism would tempt it.

Agriculture, then, is not really in danger,

and may work out its destiny in peace. The return to the land will not be brought about by violent and empirical methods, but scientifically, and by men of good will working in concord and unity for the ordering of the products of the nation in harmony and proportion.

The days are past in which there was no need for thus keeping things under control—the days when there was a sort of water-tight partition between all the nations. Nowadays, when all the markets of the world are interwoven and interdependent, their movements are much more complex; the least mishap in a remote corner of the globe is felt right through to the other side. It is essential that all the cogs of the wheel of commerce should fit into each other if it is not to break down.

To ameliorate the lot of our working-classes and ward off the dangers that are impending, there is, I repeat once more, but one thing to do: to provide them with new fields of labour by sending them back to the land. To advocate this solution of the problem before us has been the purpose of my book, which may be said to be merely an expansion of a profound thought uttered long ago by a Chinese philosopher—a thought which should be inscribed upon the walls of our schools in letters of gold—

"The well-being of a people is like a tree: agriculture is its root, manufacture and commerce are its branches and its leaves; if the root is injured, the leaves fall, the branches break away, and the tree dies."

THE END

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